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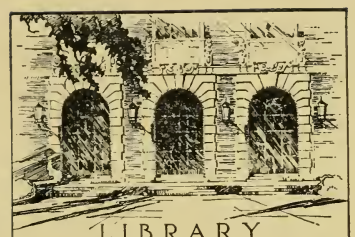

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TWO WORLDS OF FASHION.

LONDON:
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TWO WORLDS OF FASHION.

A Novel.

By CALTHORPE STRANGE.

'Have I dream'd the bearing of our knights
Tells of a manhood ever less and lower?
Or whence the fear lest this my realm, uprear'd
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
From flat confusion and brute violences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no more?'

TENNYSON, *The Last Tournament.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.
1872.

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BOOK I.

Three-and-twenty Years before.

CHAPTER I.

DEVOURED BY BEARS.

Lord Carleon was two-and-twenty years of age, an orphan, handsome, and though not rich in comparison with the fortunes possessed by many other members of the titled class to which he belonged, yet sufficiently well off to enable him to live not only in comfort but with elegance, in the world of fashion in which he moved by right of birth.

It was his misfortune to have lost his mother while he was a child; and of his father, who led a selfish and dissipated life, he knew but little when he found himself left parentless. At the time of his father's death he was at Oxford, completing his education, and had just reached his majority.

He was a general favourite with the men of his college, with the best of whom his great natural abilities served to put him on a level of intellectual equality, though he made no pretence to scholastic acquirements, nor any effort to win academic honours. He had other views of the uses to which he should put his youth and freedom, in the life that opened out before him on the death of his father.

The ivory doors of the Temple of Pleasure were thrown open to him, and he speedily found his way into its innermost penetralia. For twelve months the intoxicating and enervating draught of luxurious indulgence was never absent from his lips; until at last he had drunk down to the very lees of the cup, and tasted of satiety and disgust.

At two-and-twenty, however, life easily recoups itself for losses incurred in this way, and Lord Carleon's character was of too strong a type to suffer itself to be over-

thrown for more than a brief space. Change of scene, change of pursuit, both were open to him as the natural resources of his condition, and without hesitation he turned to them for relief from the ennui and discontent that had overtaken him; for he was yet too young to fall into cynicism and the mean habits of vice.

Among the possessions that had come to him with the patrimonial estates was a chateau, or hunting-lodge, on the borders of Switzerland, in which his father had been accustomed to spend a good deal of his time during the later years of his life, in company with a select number of companions of both sexes; whose free ways of living might have attracted inconvenient observation in any less secluded place. As it was, strange stories were current in the mouths of the peasants of the neighbourhood, concerning the kind of life led there by the English *milor* and his guests.

The chateau de Carleon was built on the

side of one of the mountains of the Jura, in the midst of some of the wildest and most picturesque scenery of the wild and picturesque country linking France and Switzerland; a tract of country made to be the delight of landscape painters, who flock to it for materials and inspiration during the summer and autumn months.

Except to these visitors, the profound solitudes of the mountains are almost unknown to strangers; and the valleys and mountain sides are inhabited by populations ignorant of every thing that passes in the world beyond the bounds of their native forests.

Erected some four hundred years before, the chateau, though of no great size, was a sombre and imposing building. Above it rose a pine-forest, dark and stately; below it lay a deep valley. Its whole aspect was romantic, and suggestive of strange adventures.

To this far-removed retreat Reginald,

Lord Carleon, betook himself, to the surprise and more or less to the regret of the gay circles in which he had found only too much pleasure.

He had, so to speak, inherited from his father a love of field-sports; at his old chateau in the Jura this was the only passion he could cultivate. Once arrived there, he gave himself up with a constantly-increasing ardour to hunting the fox and wild boar. Day and night he devoted himself to the pursuit of game.

Thus he perfectly succeeded in giving to his life the thorough and complete change he had sought. Isolated as he was, having for companions only the few servants requisite for the guardianship of the chateau, and the preservation of the game with which the estate surrounding it was abundantly stocked, time rarely hung heavily upon his hands. The weather was his only enemy, and when that showed itself unconquerably perverse, he had the inexhaustible resource of his books.

Occasionally he varied the routine of his home life, that is to say, whenever a sense of its monotony happened to come upon him. At these times he would descend into the kitchen, and make one among his people seated about the blazing pine-wood fire, smoking his pipe with them, and joining in their friendly chat.

He had grown to like this sort of life, and it might have gone on pleasantly for many years but for an adventure which brought about an entire change of his destiny.

It was December. Snow had fallen heavily at intervals for three or four days, followed by frost, which had given somewhat of consistence to the soft crust that covered the earth to the depth of two or three feet.

Old Dominique, the head-keeper, had been sent by his master into the mountain to see if he could discover any fresh traces of the presence of wild boars, giving promise of sport. He had been expected to return

to the chateau by about six o'clock in the evening, but at nine o'clock he had not reappeared.

Becoming seriously alarmed for the safety of the old man, Lord Carleon was about to dispatch half a dozen men in search of him, when the bell belonging to the outer gate of the chateau was heard to ring. Without a moment's delay the gate was opened, and a few seconds later, Dominique entered the kitchen, where his master and the others were assembled.

The light from an enormous iron candelabrum, suspended above the fire-place, fell full upon his face the instant he crossed the threshold, and showed that he was very pale.

'What is the matter, Dominique?' demanded Lord Carleon kindly. 'Has any thing happened to you?'

'No, not to *me*, milor,' the old man replied.

'To whom, then?'

'To poor François Nivet and his wife,

who live a little beyond Ollioles, by the Goat's Knoll,' replied the keeper huskily.

'What has happened to them?'

'It hardly bears thinking of, it makes the flesh creep on one's bones!' groaned Dominique with a shudder.

Lord Carleon knew the old man, that his sensibility was as dried-up and callous as his skin. For such words to come from his lips, therefore, was a certain assurance that something terrible must have occurred to have produced so unusual an effect on his mind.

'Some great misfortune has befallen the poor people,' said Lord Carleon. 'Do not keep us in suspense, my good Dominique.'

'Poor souls, poor souls!' cried the old man. 'They had two children—you may have seen them often, milor—handsome as the day, a boy and a girl, one four, the other six years old. Poor François, poor Glaudine! they loved their little ones, as good parents should, with all their hearts.'

'Well, well?' demanded Lord Carleon.

'Well,' replied the old man in a choking voice, 'at this moment they've—they've no longer any children to love.'

'Good heavens! what has become of their little ones?'

'Nothing remains of the poor things; not a rag of their dress, not a fragment of their flesh! Both of them have been devoured!'

'Devoured?' cried Lord Carleon in a tone of consternation, while a thrill of horror ran through the circle of eager listeners who surrounded the old keeper.

'Devoured!'

The word escaped from every lip like a lugubrious echo. Then for a moment there was a dead silence, broken by Lord Carleon.

'Have the wolves in these parts so soon become ferocious?' he inquired.

'It was not wolves that did this,' replied Dominique.

'Not wolves!'

'It was done by bears, milor.'

'Bears!' cried Lord Carleon; 'is that certain?'

'*I* saw them,' replied the old man.

Dominique never spoke falsely. The fact which he affirmed was therefore certain, though none the less strange.

After being permitted by his master to drink a small glass of brandy, for the purpose of putting his ideas together, as he said, Dominique prepared to satisfy more completely the breathless curiosity of his auditors.

'Milor,' he began, 'I had been all day in the woods, searching for traces of wild boars upon the snow without coming on any. Towards three o'clock, finding myself on the other side of Ollioles, I went into François' cottage to get a glass of wine, for I was tired and wanted refreshment badly.'

Dominique was always prolix beyond measure in his manner of telling a story;

but those who knew him were well aware that any attempt to bring him sooner to the point of his narrative would simply confuse him, and delay rather than expedite the desired end. He was left therefore on the present occasion to tell his story entirely in his own way, without question or interruption of any kind; though the patience of his auditors was sorely tried before he had done.

'François,' he continued, 'welcomed me as an old comrade, and opened a bottle of his best; and as I felt the beginnings of an appetite, his wife got down a ham, and soon fried me a couple of rashers with an onion or two cut fine—cut nice and fine.'

Eager and impatient as Lord Carleon was to hear the tragic incidents of the old man's story, he could not repress a smile on hearing him lay such great stress on this altogether unimportant detail.

'We were seated, François and I, on either side of the fire,' the old man went

on, 'glass and fork in hand, and our feet warm in the ashes; and I was telling him about some wonderful shots your late father, milor, had made one day when we were out in the woods together, when suddenly he interrupted me, and turned to his wife to ask her where the two children were.

'Just outside in the road,' she told him, 'playing in the snow—building castles with it, and pelting each other with snow-balls.'

'No harm will come to them there,' he said. Then he turned to me again, and asked me to go on with the story I was telling him, of a famous right-and-left shot of your honoured father's. It's a story François is never tired of listening to, and so I tell it to him every time we meet; but I hadn't got far with it before we were both startled by a sound—the cry of a child—a distant cry, that stopped suddenly, as if checked and not allowed to finish.

'Glaudine dropped the frying-pan she

was holding; François looked at me, and I looked at him and at his wife. We had all three turned pale. I sprang up and seized my gun, and François snatched a knife from the table; then both of us rushed out of the cottage.

'What a sight met our eyes! O, milor, if I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget it! The two children had disappeared; but at sixty paces from the door of the cottage, we could see stains of blood upon the snow, and two gray bears of enormous size hurrying off in the direction of the wood of La Chaise.

'Glaudine shrieked and fell senseless. At the sound of the poor woman's cry, one of the bears half turned to look back, and then we saw that he held in his jaws the motionless body of one of her children. The sight gave us a moment's courage. There might still be time to save at least one of the poor little innocents.

'François bounded on in pursuit of the

bears, and I followed him as quickly as I could; but I am old, and he is young, and he soon distanced me. I had my gun, however, and he had only a knife. As soon as I got within fair range, I stopped, aimed carefully at the head of the brute nearest to me, and fired. The bear shook his ears for a moment, but did not slacken his pace. I had touched him behind the ear; but a simple ball of lead and a single charge of powder make hardly a scratch on such a hide as his.

'Bounding over the snow with the swiftness of a chamois, François passed the hinder of the two bears, then turned and faced the brute. It was a terrible moment. The poor father *might* succeed in saving one of his children, but, what was more likely, he might himself perish in the attempt.

'Neither one nor other of these events happened.

'The bear disdained his adversary, whose ill-sharpened knife failed even to penetrate

the dense coat of fur which covered the chest of the savage brute. Without turning to the right or left, the bear pursued its course, overthrowing François fainting upon the snow. A moment later, the two bears disappeared into the forest.

'When I came up to where he was lying, I thought poor François was dead; but though he was bathed in blood, no serious harm had been done to him. The bear in passing had struck him on the chest with its claws, and his knife had closed upon three fingers of his right hand, and cut into them deeply.

'Seeing that all hope was over with regard to the poor children, I carried their unhappy father and mother into the cottage. For nearly an hour they both remained insensible: but at last they opened their eyes and remembered all that had happened. Poor souls! what could they do but throw themselves into each other's arms and weep?

'I cried with them—you'll hardly credit it, milor—I cried with them, for I felt it was impossible to console them, and it seemed to me that the only thing that could at all comfort them was to let them cry together, and to cry a bit in company with them, poor heart-broken souls.

'By the time their grief had spent itself a little, night had come on, and I had to think about returning to the chateau. It was dark when I left the cottage—and walking in three feet of snow isn't easy, especially when you can't see a yard of the way before you—and that's the reason, milor, why I'm back so late.'

Every one of the listeners to Dominique's terrible relation was deeply impressed by it; but none more deeply than Lord Carleon. All the incidents of the shocking catastrophe were as vividly impressed upon his mind as if he himself had been an actor in the distressing drama. During the whole of the night he

found it impossible to sleep without dreaming of the horrors recounted by the old keeper.

As soon as it was daylight he sent for Dominique.

'Tell me,' he said; 'it is not usual for bears to be in this canton, is it?'

'They are sometimes, but very rarely, seen, milor. When the winters are long and severe, they come down into the plains.'

'Where do you imagine those you saw yesterday came from?'

'From the high mountains, fifteen leagues or more from here, milor.'

'Do you think they will go back there?'

The old hunter's eyes flashed.

'No, by all the devils!' he cried; 'not if I can prevent them!'

'We'll try together, Dominique,' said Lord Carleon. 'Up to the present time I've shot nothing but inoffensive game; I

am glad of the opportunity to try a higher kind of sport. Do you think these bears will remain for any length of time in this part of the country?'

'For a few days possibly.'

'And do you think we shall be able to find them?'

'By searching well for them; only—'

'Only as little time as possible must be allowed to elapse before the search is begun? We'll lose none, friend Dominique. Do you understand the art of bear-hunting?'

'O yes, milor; I learnt it in the Oberland, when I was young; and one doesn't easily forget that sort of craft.'

'Good,' cried Lord Carleon. 'How long will it take you to get ready?'

'Time to eat a morsel of food and to buckle-on my gaiters,' replied the old woodsman.

'In half an hour *I* shall be ready to start,' said Lord Carleon.

Dominique bowed and retired, full of admiration of his master, and satisfaction at the idea of taking vengeance on the savage destroyers of his poor friend's children.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW CATASTROPHE.

A SUBSTANTIAL breakfast of cold meat, with two or three glasses of Madeira, was quickly taken by Lord Carleon, who then put on his shooting-dress. While he was completing the buttoning of his gaiters, Dominique tapped at his door, and asked permission to speak with him.

'You see I am ready,' said Lord Carleon, when the old man had entered the room. 'Is there anything you want?'

'I want to ask you a question, milor, that's all,' replied Dominique, crossing to a stand of arms placed against one of the four sides of the room.

'A question! What is it?'

'Which of these guns are you going to take with you to-day?'

'The one I always carry,' answered Lord Carleon.

The old keeper shook his head.

'Too light, milor,' he said; 'it hits hard enough when it's only a question of knocking over a hare or a roebuck, but it'll do no damage to a bear.'

'In that case,' replied Lord Carleon, 'as you know all the guns in this room, point out to me the one I ought to take.'

Dominique's eyes sparkled with pleasure as he laid his hand upon a short double-barrelled gun of extremely plain appearance. Lord Carleon was struck with the expression of the old keeper's face as he took the weapon from its place in the gun-rack.

'A special interest of some sort attaches to that gun, I fancy?' he remarked.

'It was the favourite gun of your late father, milor, when he went to shoot the

wild boar. It has not its fellow in any gun I ever saw.'

'Certainly, then, it's the one I will take,' said Lord Carleon, drawing from his pocket his powder-flask, and also some bullets and wads, preparatory to loading the piece.

'What is milor going to do?' inquired the old man, with an air of blank astonishment.

'Load my gun, as you see,' replied his master, smiling at what appeared the oddness of the question.

'With these?' demanded Dominique, taking up one of the bullets and a wad, and disdainfully making them dance in the hollow of his hand.

'Why not with these?' inquired Lord Carleon.

Dominique once more shook his head.

'If I am not to put bullets in my gun, what am I to put?' cried Lord Carleon, becoming somewhat impatient under the repeated objections of the old forester.

'These, milor,' replied Dominique, placing on the table before his master some iron slugs an inch and a half long, flat at one end and pointed at the other; 'nothing but these will find their way through the hide of a bear, which is so tough that a leaden bullet does little more than tickle it.'

'Oblige me by loading my gun yourself, Dominique,' said his master, smiling again.

When this important operation had been performed to the old keeper's entire satisfaction, he and Lord Carleon started in quest of the bears.

On quitting the chateau, they naturally turned their steps in the direction of the scene of the tragedy of the preceding day. They found the cottage of the unfortunate François shut up; and they afterwards ascertained that, on the news being spread of the dreadful misfortune which had overtaken the husband and wife, their relatives had taken them away from a place where

every object would remind them of their misery.

A snow-castle, commenced by the children, was still standing intact, and scattered about were a number of snow-balls, made by their hands; and near these fragile mementos of their innocent pleasure cut short by death, there were broad stains of blood. Tears rose to the eyes of the two men at this pitiful sight.

Farther on, a short distance, they came upon the traces of poor François' vain attempt to stop the ferocious beast. At this spot the snow was trampled and reddened; and there the marks of human footsteps ceased to be visible. The course taken by the two bears towards the woods was plainly distinguishable, however.

The forest reached, the real difficulties of the pursuit commenced. Here and there the wide-spread branches of the firs had prevented a single flake of snow from falling to the earth. On the clear spaces thus

left all trace of the bears was lost; for among the most cunning of wild animals, as they are well known to be, the bears, of which Lord Carleon and his old servant were in search, had taken advantage of every spot bare of snow, either to spare themselves fatigue, or to guard against pursuit.

After forcing their way some two leagues through the forest, Lord Carleon, feeling both tired and hungry, sat down at the foot of a gigantic fir, and in company with Dominique partook of food which the old man had brought with him.

Speedily refreshed and ready to continue the search, Lord Carleon exclaimed as he rose to his feet:

'Will these infernal brutes lead us much farther?'

'There's no saying,' replied Dominique, calmly.

'I'd give a good deal to come at once face to face with them,' cried Lord Carleon.

'Whenever that happens, milor,' said the old man very gravely, 'don't forget what I'm going to tell you.'

'What is that?'

'Never fire at a distance; wait till the animal comes close to you; seize the moment when, rising on its hind feet and spreading its paws to embrace and stifle you, it opens its jaws; then boldly take aim at the interior of its throat, and fire both barrels. If your hand is only steady, milor, the bear will fall dead at your feet.'

'I'll not forget your good council, Dominique, be sure of it,' replied Lord Carleon.

And the two once more started with ardour in quest of the terrible brutes they were seeking to destroy.

The farther they advanced into the forest, the greater were the difficulties they had to encounter. In many places, where the trees consisted entirely of firs, the traces they were following ended suddenly, and

they had to explore in all directions over the space of a quarter of a league before the bears' track was re-discovered.

Day at length began to decline, and, sinking from fatigue as they were, it became necessary to find a shelter for the night. To enable them better to judge of their position, Lord Carleon ascended to the top of one of the tallest firs he could find, from which point of view he was so fortunate as to observe two white films of smoke relieved against the rapidly darkening sky, and indicating the presence of two habitations at no great distance, that to the right appearing to be the nearer of the two.

Towards this point, which promised to be soonest gained, they bent their steps, and in half an hour or so they reached the threshold of a woodman's hut, the door of which stood open, as if in sign of hospitality. As the two tired hunters entered, they saw, to their great satisfaction, a roaring fire upon the hearth.

The woodman and his wife, two worthy old people, received their unlooked-for guests as well as they could, their poverty not preventing them from setting before the hungry pair a meal to which they did ample justice.

As soon as Lord Carleon had appeased his appetite, he turned to his host, to question him on the subject of the bears of which he and Dominique were in quest. He could hardly have addressed himself to a better informant.

'O yes,' answered the woodman, 'I know all about them. They came down from the high mountains above a month ago, and established themselves about a league and a half from here; and they've kept everybody in these parts in constant alarm ever since. They've already devoured a horse, two cows, and several sheep. They are always on the move; sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left. As you've followed them from Ollioles, I should say

it's pretty certain they'll remain for a few days in the neighbourhood of their lair.'

'Do you know whereabouts their lair is?' asked Lord Carleon eagerly.

'Certainly,' replied the woodman. 'It's in a cave in the Dent du Chien, by the edge of the Fosse aux Loups.'

Dominique, who had not so far taken any part in the conversation between his master and the old woodman, now broke in.

'I know it! I know it!' he cried, nodding his head vigorously. 'I have often accompanied your late father through this part of the country, and know every turn of it. The Dent du Chien is a great pile of rocks, thrown upon one another; and on the top of all there is a big white stone, which, from afar, seems to have the shape of a young dog's tooth, which accounts for its name.'

'And what is the Fosse aux Loups?' asked Lord Carleon.

'It's a wide gulf, more than two hundred feet deep, the sides of which are nearly per-

pendicular; so that it is impossible for a man to descend by them to the bottom.'

'Do you also know where the cave is, of which this good man has told us?'

'No, milor; I own I don't know that,' replied Dominique.

'I know it well, monsieur,' said the woodman, 'and could guide you to it blindfold.'

This important point settled, it was arranged that the adventure of the bears' cave should be attempted early on the following morning; and as the evening was by this time far advanced, the woodman and his wife retired to their bed, and Lord Carleon and Dominique laid themselves down in their clothes upon a pile of sweet heather spread for them beside the fireplace.

Lord Carleon was soon sound asleep, and dreamed that he saw the sides of the largest room in his chateau entirely hung with bear-skins, the spoils of his hunting prowess. Before it was barely light in the

morning Dominique aroused him, and informed him it was time to start for the Fosse aux Loups.

Guided by the old woodman, Lord Carleon and Dominique followed, for the space of three-quarters of an hour, a broad and well-defined path through the forest, and at length passed before a small house, the surrounding grounds of which were enclosed with high palings.

This house, though simple and modest in appearance, was evidently not the abode of peasants. From the road the garden was separated by a wall some four feet high, through the barred gate of which could be seen a short avenue leading up to the house.

At the sound of footsteps a black dog, of the Abruzzi breed, and of the largest size, raised himself against the bars of the garden-gate, and began to bark in a formidable tone.

'Quiet, Fidèle! quiet, old fellow!' cried the woodman in a caressing way.

The dog, instantly recognising the speaker, ceased barking, and bounded with pleasure.

'What a magnificent animal!' cried Lord Carleon. 'Do you know whether it is for sale?'

For a moment the woodman looked at his interrogator with an expression in his face that suggested as plainly as words that no more stupid question could possibly have been put to him. The only answer he returned at first was a loud burst of laughter.

'For sale! Fidèle for sale!' he cried at length. 'What an idea! Fidèle's no light weight, as you may easily reckon for yourself, by his size; but if you were to offer for him his weight in gold, you wouldn't get him!'

'His owner sets great store by him, then?' remarked Lord Carleon.

'Not more than he deserves,' replied the old woodman warmly. 'He's as good a guard to the house as any ten men would

be any day; with him on watch, these ladies may sleep as quietly and securely in this out-of-the-way place as if they were living in the very middle of a big village.'

'And who are these ladies?' asked Lord Carleon.

'Madame Simon and her daughter, monsieur.'

'Madame Simon?'

'As kind and good a lady as ever breathed!' cried the honest woodman. 'She's the widow of a sub-lieutenant of gendarmerie, who left her almost without fortune, and with a little daughter—beautiful as the day when her father died ten years ago, and more beautiful than ever now. Madame Simon is not rich—more's the pity; but, though she has only this house and a small sum in the funds to live upon, she constantly finds means in hard times to lend a helping hand to others still poorer than herself.'

'And she lives here all the year round? and alone?'

'That is to say, with her daughter and a maid-servant, and, as I told you, Fidèle.'

'Three women living alone in this lone spot, and through the long winter nights!' cried Lord Carleon. 'They must be endowed with little short of super-human courage!'

'O, monsieur,' replied the woodman, 'Madame Simon does nothing but good to all about her; and there's nobody hereabouts evil-disposed enough to wish to do her any harm. And besides she has Fidèle; and Fidèle, as I said before, is as good a guardian as any ten men would be.'

The subject was not pursued any farther; the difficulties of the ground demanding the undivided attention of the whole party.

Soon after passing Madame Simon's house, they found their progress impeded by obstacles of all kinds—shattered trunks of trees, great jutting masses of rock, enor-

mous fragments of granite. The snow was thickly spread over all these objects, hiding them from view or disguising their true shapes, thus rendering them highly dangerous to whoever ventured amongst them.

It was a break-neck journey, indeed, every step of the way; but the hunters were fortunate enough to reach the foot of the Dent du Chien without accident, after parting with their guide, whose services were no longer needed.

The gulf called the Fosse aux Loups was of circular form and profound depth. On the face of the solid and almost perpendicular rock, grew here and there a few stunted bushes. On one side only, a sort of natural path — unequal, tortuous, and strewn with gigantic stones—led up to the heap of granite blocks crowned by the Dent du Chien.

Among these blocks and half hidden by shrubs the openings of two or three caverns were to be seen. In one of these, if the

woodman's intelligence was correct, the bears of which Lord Carleon was in pursuit had taken up their temporary abode.

'This is the place, milor,' said Dominique.

'We had better at once scale the rocks and search the caverns, then, I suppose,' replied his master.

'Pardon me, milor, that would be to run a great risk, without any chance of success,' answered the old hunter. 'What we have to do is to wait till the brutes come out of their den, on their way into the open country; they must take this path, and will meet us on their road.'

'You have experience in this kind of sport, and I have none,' said Lord Carleon; 'I leave you to make all the arrangements as you think best.'

Dominique promised to do his utmost to deserve his master's confidence, and then set himself to examine the ground carefully. When he had completed his survey, he

pointed to a fragment of granite, about four feet high and about the same width, which had fallen from the rocks above into the middle of the pathway.

'That will be an excellent post for you, milor,' he said; 'stationed behind that block, you will have at once a rampart to protect you from the attack of the beasts, and a rest for your gun, so that you may aim with certain effect.'

'And where are you going to place yourself?' demanded Lord Carleon.

'There,' replied the old man, after looking about him for a moment,—'there.'

He pointed down into the gulf, where, some five or six feet from the brink, the shattered remains of a fir-tree, that had at some time taken root in a crevice of the rock, but had been torn away by the force of an avalanche, or by the falling of the rocks above it, were seen offering a frail resting-place for the feet of an adventurous hunter. The post was a dangerous one, but

in all other respects well chosen for the purpose.

At the moment, however, when the two hunters were about to take up the positions determined on, they were startled by a wholly unexpected sound—a wild and prolonged roar, such as Lord Carleon had never before heard—coming from a pine-wood some half a league to the right of the track taken by the hunters and their guide up to the Fosse aux Loups.

'What can be the meaning of that?' inquired Lord Carleon.

'It means, milor, that these bears have been earlier risers than we. They've already left their den.'

'And so, for to-day at least, we shall have our labour for our pains?'

'That's quite certain. But to-morrow we will do better—or rather to-night, for we had best be back here before the day dawns.'

As there was nothing else to be done,

Lord Carleon and the old hunter returned to the woodman's hut, where they spent the rest of the day.

At two o'clock on the following morning, by the light of the moon, the two hunters once more took their way to the Fosse aux Loups, passing the house of Madame Simon, where they were saluted by the deep-toned voice of the watchful Fidèle.

By the time they reached the foot of the Dent du Chien the moon was hidden behind the mountain-tops, and there was but just light sufficient to enable them to take their stations at the points agreed upon.

To Lord Carleon it seemed an age before the first signs of dawn became visible. He kept his eyes constantly turned towards the openings of the caverns, and he had his gun ready to his hand. At length the heavy silence which hung upon the wild and gloomy place was broken by a light sound, as if made by the passage of some object moving cautiously through the bushes that

overhung the abyss, into which a stone fell, bounding from ledge to ledge.

'Be ready, milor; and take care of yourself,' cried Dominique, in a voice raised little above a whisper.

The words had hardly reached Lord Carleon's ears before one of the two bears appeared at the mouth of one of the caverns, roaring loudly. After sniffing the air suspiciously several times, he began slowly to descend among the rocks; his companion following at four or five paces behind him, and both scarcely distinguishable in the dim light from the rocks amid which they were moving.

Of Dominique Lord Carleon could see nothing but the head and arms, and the barrel of his gun, the butt of which rested against his right shoulder. Like the old hunter, Lord Carleon held himself ready to fire without a moment's delay, when the time for doing so arrived.

The two bears, preserving their respec-

tive distance, came along the path on which Lord Carleon was stationed, increasing their pace to a slow trot as the ground became freer of impediments. For an instant they were lost to sight, at a point where the path took a sudden turn; but the crunching of the snow under their heavy paws was still to be heard.

Presently the foremost of the bears reappeared, and advanced about a dozen paces in the direction of Lord Carleon, when a vivid flash rose above the edges of the abyss, followed by the sharp report of Dominique's gun. With a roar of pain, the leading animal fell crashing into the gulf, at the bottom of which it expired in agony.

For an instant the second bear stopped, as if terrified and in doubt what to do; but then it seemed to take a sudden resolution—a resolution to avenge its slaughtered companion. Scrambling swiftly over the rough ground, it made direct for the jutting rock behind which Lord Carleon was posted.

A moment later its iron claws were grating on the granite, above which its fierce half-opened jaws quickly rose on Lord Carleon's sight. Remembering all the old hunter's advice, Lord Carleon took a quick but steady aim at the terrible brute, and pressed both triggers at the same time.

At the moment of his gun's discharge, a cry that almost froze his blood reached Lord Carleon's ear, and as he turned his eyes involuntarily towards the spot where, far below him, Dominique had stationed himself, a terrible spectacle met his view.

The roots of the shattered tree, to the strength of which the old hunter had trusted his safety, had given way beneath his weight; and Lord Carleon saw the brave old man—after vainly struggling to gain a hand-hold upon the remorseless rock—plunged into the awful abyss, at the bottom of which he found instantaneous death.

Almost before Lord Carleon had realised the horrible catastrophe, however, he had

passed into unconsciousness. The death-roar of the monster he had shot rang in his ears, a whirl of fetid breath was cast into his face, and a weight as of a mountain fell upon his chest.

His last thought was, 'I am a dead man!'

CHAPTER III.

TWO LOVES.

Lord Carleon escaped with life, however, though sorely crushed by the enormous brute which had fallen on him in its death-agony.

When, after an interval of many hours, he returned to consciousness, he at first imagined himself to be under the influence of a dream. The Dent du Chien, the bears, and the abyss had all disappeared. He felt as if every limb of his body was broken, and found himself as incapable of making the slightest movement, as if he had been stricken with paralysis.

By degrees he realised the fact that he was lying in a bed, and that he was wounded both in the head and chest. He perceived

too that it was night-time, the only light in the chamber being that of a wood-fire glowing upon the hearth.

Closing his eyes once again, he tried to recall the circumstances which had led to his present condition; and recollection served him only too faithfully. The cry of despair raised by old Dominique as he sank into the horrid gulf—the very scent of the ferocious bear's infected breath—returned to him with all the terribleness of a second reality; and once more he became insensible, and remained so for nearly fourteen hours.

The voices of two persons speaking in subdued tones near his bed were the first sounds that vaguely reached his ears on his at length returning to consciousness. The fresh pure quality of one of the two voices marked it as unmistakably that of a young girl; the second voice was that of a man of mature years. He listened dreamily to a conversation carried on by the two speakers.

'Well, doctor?' demanded the young girl, in a tone that implied strong interest in the answer sought.

'He's better,' replied the other speaker.

'Much?'

'More than I had ventured to expect.'

'You have hopes now, then?'

'Yes. His face is calm, and I find that he is almost free from fever.'

'Yesterday evening you were uneasy, were you not?'

'Decidedly so.'

'What did you fear—since, as you told me, no essential organ had been injured?'

'What I told you then, I tell you now, my dear; but the shock given to the system has been very violent, and I was justified in dreading the appearance of *tetanus*, or lock-jaw—from which there would have been no hope of saving him.'

'But you have now ceased to feel uneasy, is it not so, doctor?'

'In great part, at least.'

'O, how glad I am to hear you say even that!'

This last exclamation, pronounced in the gentlest accents by the young girl, produced on Lord Carleon a delightful effect. He figured to himself, as he lay with closed eyes, that an angel had miraculously saved him from the death which had threatened him; and that this angel still continued her mission of protection, watching over him till his cure should be completed. Then he opened his eyes.

The vision took bodily form.

A young girl, of seventeen at most, stood by his bedside, her radiant face turned towards him, and seeming to regard him with profound interest. Raphael, the painter of Madonnas, never dreamed of a head more chaste and perfectly ideal for his Virgins.

Her fair face was relieved, as by a golden frame, by her rich blonde hair. Long silken lashes of somewhat a darker hue veiled her large blue eyes, and softened with light

shadows the already tender expression of their regard. Her slender form took a new grace even from the extreme simplicity of her dress, which was made of a woollen fabric of sober colour.

Instantly on observing that the invalid's eyes were unclosed, she started and retreated from the bedside; and immediately her place was taken by a man of venerable aspect dressed in black.

'How do you find yourself now, monsieur?' inquired this person.

'With the exception of an oppression of the chest, and a pain in the head,' replied Lord Carleon, 'I am tolerably well, I think.'

'Very good,' said the doctor, feeling his patient's pulse; 'going on as well, indeed, as I could possibly expect or wish. You have nothing to do but to rest quietly in your bed, and try and sleep as much as you can. By the morning I hope both the oppression and the headache will have left you.'

While the doctor was speaking, a door

of the chamber opened, and with a joyous yelp, a large dog bounded towards the bed, and fell to licking one of Lord Carleon's hands which hung over the side.

'Come here, come here, Fidèle!' cried an unseen speaker, from the farther side of the room; and the dog immediately obeyed the summons.

The name given to the dog instantly recalled to Lord Carleon's recollection the noble animal he had so much admired, and at the same time told him that he was then under the roof of Madame Simon.

No assurance could have been more agreeable to him. The account of that lady and her daughter given him by the old woodman returned immediately to his mind, and made him regard his misadventure almost in the light of a piece of good fortune, since it had procured him admittance to their home. He would have entered at once into conversation, but that the doctor earnestly begged him to refrain from talking.

Meanwhile the ladies had retired from the room; the doctor shortly afterwards followed and gave them his directions as to the treatment of their guest. Left alone and in perfect silence, Lord Carleon, after musing for a brief space on the circumstances of his position, sank into a tranquil and refreshing sleep which lasted uninterruptedly through the night.

When he awoke the next morning, his condition fully realised the hopes expressed by the doctor. He had recovered sufficient strength to be able to raise himself upon his elbow and look about him.

A pale ray of winter sunlight penetrated the lattice-window of the room he was lying in, and fell upon the carefully-polished red-brick floor. Opposite the foot of the bed was a common stone-built fireplace, in which several large blocks of wood were burning. On the chimney-piece, in the centre under a glass shade, stood a small figure of the Saviour, modelled in wax; and at either end

was placed a bright brass candlestick, almost as large as those used in churches, each holding an unlit candle of white wax.

The rest of the furniture—almost poor in quality—was marked by irreproachable neatness. A few engravings, representing religious subjects, in frames of black wood, were hung upon the walls, and relieved from absolute barrenness the plain paper of grayish hue with which they were covered.

Lord Carleon had scarcely finished making these few observations, when the doctor came into the room, and looked at his patient with a smile of satisfaction.

'A-ha!' he cried; 'it appears that I was not far wrong in my calculations. You have passed an excellent night, and all is going well with you. Tell me—are you still suffering any pain?'

'None whatever; and, except that I feel extremely weak, it seems to me that there is nothing the matter with me.'

'As to the weakness, it's easily accounted

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for,' replied the doctor cheerily. 'It is the result of a pretty free bleeding, to which I was obliged to subject you to keep down fever.'

'Accept my best thanks for your attention, my dear doctor,' said Lord Carleon; 'and pray add to my obligations to you by telling me how it has come about that I find myself here.'

'In the simplest manner possible. The day before yesterday, about three o'clock in the morning, you left the hut of Jean Nicod the woodman, to place yourself, with your companion, in ambuscade by the Fosse aux Loups. Finding that you had not either of you returned by the middle of the day, and suspecting that some harm had befallen you, he went in search of you.

'His worst fears were realised. On arriving at the edge of the abyss, he found you lying under the carcass of one of the two bears you had been hunting, and the weight of the enormous brute crushing you

to death. With infinite care, he got you from under the bear, and then took you upon his shoulders, and carried you to a door which he knew would be opened to receive you.

'Madame Simon, that living image of heaven's own charity, received you as she might have received a dying son. She at once sent for me — her friend of twenty years; and when I was able to assure her that your injuries were less serious than they had at first appeared to be, the happiness she felt was an abundant reward for her care. The good report I shall now be able to make of your condition will give her still farther pleasure.

'To-morrow, monsieur,' continued the doctor, 'I shall hope to let you get up for an hour; and in four or five days, if all goes well, and you desire to do so, you will be strong enough to return to your own home.'

Lord Carleon warmly thanked the good

doctor for his kindness; but added, hesitatingly,

'You have not spoken of the old attendant who was with me at the Fosse aux Loups,—Dominique?'

The doctor turned away his head, and made no answer.

There was no mistaking the significance of the gesture. Up to that moment Lord Carleon had entertained a vague hope that his old servant might have escaped death; but the marked silence of the doctor spoke as plainly as words. Dominique had perished.

Lord Carleon's eyes filled with tears as the terrible certainty impressed itself upon his mind.

Almost before he had recovered his self-possession, Madame Simon, accompanied by her daughter, entered the chamber. She appeared to be little over forty years of age; and she was still handsome, her regular and softly-outlined features express-

ing almost evangelical goodness and charity. She wore a black dress and a cap of black crape, which partly concealed her prematurely-whitened hair.

Madame Simon still mourned the loss of her husband, and she had vowed to wear mourning for the remainder of her life, in unison with the life-long mourning of her heart.

'Come in, come in,' cried the doctor, observing that she hesitated at the threshold of the door, and interrogated him by her looks,—'come in; our patient will be happy to have an opportunity to thank you for your kind hospitality and ceaseless care.'

Madame Simon approached the bed, her handsome face illumined by a smile, and with a look of almost maternal tenderness.

'Heaven be thanked, monsieur, that all danger is past!' she cried, in answer to the expression of his grateful acknowledgments of her kindness. Then turning to the

doctor, she asked: 'Your patient is still very weak, is he not?'

'Doubtless he is,' replied the doctor; for he has not only lost a good deal of blood, but he has eaten nothing for forty-eight hours.'

'May he eat something now?'

'Certainly; so long as it is something light and easy of digestion.'

'I have had some chicken-broth made; a cup of this will not hurt him, I think.'

Madame Simon directed her daughter to instruct the servant to bring a cup of the broth; and the damsel left the room.

In a few moments she reappeared, in company with a young girl carrying a cupful of broth on a plate of coarse china. This girl's name was Marie, and she was the only servant of Madame Simon.

Marie was twenty years of age. She was born on the shores of the Lake of Geneva, and now wore the picturesque costume of the women of her country,—

a short petticoat of blue woollen stuff, trimmed at the bottom with a wide band of black velvet; a black tightly-fitting bodice pressed in her supple waist, and well displayed the rounded graces of her form; long plaits of ebony-hued hair escaped from under her little black velvet cap and descended almost to her heels.

The two young girls, standing side by side, presented a picture of contrasted youthful loveliness that would have filled the soul of a great painter with delight.

Marguerite, Madame Simon's daughter, appeared to the enraptured eyes of Lord Carleon a creature wholly celestial — an angel descended upon earth, and ready to remount to her native skies. Marie, on the contrary, represented one of the most queenly types of feminine beauty. Between them, the two young girls united all the perfections. Marguerite's loveliness spoke to the heart, Marie's to the sense; and both with irresistible power.

Lord Carleon was too much charmed by the sight of these young girls to be at first completely conscious of the effect which their beauty was producing on his mind; but the full consciousness followed quickly. With a trembling hand he took the cup handed to him by Marie, and drank the contents to the last drop, without the power to turn his gaze from this young servant, whose grace was that of a queen, and from her mistress, whose ethereal beauty was that of an angel.

The doctor directed that, as his patient required of all things rest and sleep, he should now be left alone; and the direction was immediately obeyed.

Left to himself, Lord Carleon closed his eyes, and recalled every incident and charm of the vision that had just passed from his sight.

He had lived too fast,—his passions had been stirred far too wildly and vaguely,—before leaving England to enter on the se-

cluded life he had been leading in Switzerland, for his heart to have become seared or even hardened. The weariness that comes upon a young man's spirit from satiety of pleasure is like the enfeeblement of taste that overtakes the indiscriminate drinker; it is persistence only that produces lasting depravity in either case. Fortunately the fibre of Lord Carleon's mind was of a kind to rebel speedily against the serf-like subjugation demanded of it by the limitations of a life devoted to one object and self-doomed to disappointment and *désillusion*.

It is doubtful whether the heart of a young man given up to the sole pursuit of pleasure is ever touched by the fire of real love; but once so touched, it is thenceforth safe from illusion. Between a true passion and the empty emotions that may for a time pass by its name, it will never again be in doubt. Love then becomes a saviour as well as an atonement.

Lord Carleon had never loved. The

certainty of this became more and more clear to him the more he thought of the two lovely girls who had so lately stood by his bedside. He questioned his heart again and again, and the answer it returned was strange, perplexing: he loved both Marguerite and Marie!

CHAPTER IV.

A VAIN STRUGGLE.

The causes of Lord Carleon's withdrawal from the fervid life in which he had too heedlessly plunged on leaving Oxford have been stated. It was neither in the spirit of a reckless libertine nor of a soulless *roué* that he retired to his isolation in the heart of the Jura. He had feasted on pleasure till the dainty fare had lost its savour for him; that was all.

He was young, and his heart yet far from the reach of callousness—freely open, indeed, to noble instincts and generous sentiments. The double passion, therefore, with which these two charming young girls had inspired him, after the first dreamlike whirl of delighted surprise was past, filled

his mind with alarm and shame. Not for a moment did he attempt to combat the warning of his conscience, which told him that it would be an act of infamy to repay with base ingratitude the hospitality of this pure and simple home, where he had been received on the footing of a son and brother.

To struggle courageously against the growing power of his new-born passion—and, more than all, to depart as speedily as possible—he resolved on, as the only means of safety. And the resolution taken, he would have at once carried it into execution; knowing that the evils he desired to escape would but increase, and cost him greater suffering to overcome them, the longer he delayed.

Being alone, he determined to try his strength, and for that purpose descended from his bed; but he had scarcely raised himself upon his feet before it was demonstrated to him that, however strong his will might be, his physical feebleness was ex-

treme. The pain in his chest, which he had not felt for many hours, returned with renewed intensity. He felt as if all his limbs were broken; and he had barely power to throw himself back upon his bed. Another moment and he would have fainted on the floor.

Thus, as by a fatality, he was held under the roof from which the voice of honour imperiously called upon him to fly. But, though compelled to remain, he promised to be upon his guard, so that neither by look nor word should the secret of his unfortunate passion escape him.

For some few days, during his return to convalescence, he was completely successful in retaining the absolute mastery over his feelings; but, as his strength returned,—as his blood circulated in his veins more and more with its accustomed energy,—the struggle became harder to sustain.

Sometimes, seated in an easy-chair by the fireside, he found himself during long

hours alone with Marguerite—the beautiful girl wholly confiding, from being absolutely chaste of soul. Her hands at these times were ever guided by some charitable thought. Mostly they were employed in making warm clothing for the children of the poor. And while she worked she recounted to him strange legends and marvellous histories of the country round about, or sang to him, in her pure and harmonious voice, some mountain ballad.

Then all resolves became futile. He forgot the entire world—or saw nothing in it but Marguerite. He contemplated with ecstasy her angelic and timid beauty; his ears were intoxicated with the melody of her words and her songs; and he felt a force stronger than his own urging him to throw himself at her feet, and to cry, in spite of himself,

'O Marguerite! I love you!'

Still more dangerous were the occasions which threw Marie and him together—she

as the servant of the house, in the performance of the services which his invalid condition required. Sometimes he leant on her arm in moving about his room; and a sort of electric commotion filled him, a sort of voluptuous atmosphere exhaled from the beautiful peasant and enveloped him.

But from these struggles he came off victorious—respecting Marie as he respected Marguerite.

The day which he had fixed for his departure at length arrived, and with it a light char-à-bancs adapted to the mountain roads, which he had sent for from the chateau de Carleon.

The moment of parting was a sorrowful one. Madame Simon had learned to feel for her guest a deep and touching affection. Marguerite was pale. Marie's bosom heaved under her velvet bodice, and revealed her strong emotion.

Marguerite presented to him her forehead to kiss, as if he had been her brother.

He pressed his lips to her brow: it was cold as marble.

'And me, monsieur,' said Marie softly, with a familiarity in which there was nothing strange in the bosom of this family, where she was a friend rather than a servant—'and me, monsieur; will you not kiss me too?'

As she spoke she presented her cheek.

Lord Carleon bent towards her,—his limbs trembled, his sight left him. Instead of touching her cheek, his lips met hers, and a thrill of rapture shot through him.

Marie alone was aware of what was passing within him; and at the end of a few seconds he became calm, in appearance at least.

He desired to leave with the young girl some memento of his sojourn in the house of her mistress; but he could not, and would not, offer money to her. After a moment's thought, he detached from the trinkets appended to his watch-chain a small

cross of plain gold, and slipped it into her hands, whispering as he did so,

'Keep this for love of me.'

Marie's beautiful face became crimson.

She turned aside and furtively covered the cross with kisses.

The four descended to the garden, at the outer gate of which stood the char-à-bancs. Marguerite's paleness was redoubled, and she tried in vain to conceal her tears. Marie's white cheeks were flushed with crimson patches, and she turned on the departing guest a look both feverish and strange.

Fidèle, the great black dog, to whom Lord Carleon had become a recognised friend, bounded round him, seeming to express by his bark and caresses the regret he felt at parting with him.

'You will come and see us again, will you not?' said Madame Simon, tenderly.

'Certainly,' replied Lord Carleon.

'But soon?'

'Very soon.'

'Will you really come back to us soon?' stammered Marguerite, in a voice rendered indistinct by tears.

'I promise — indeed, I promise,' he replied.

But though he made this promise, it sprung as it were involuntarily from his lips, for he had firmly determined not to return; and it seemed as if Marie divined his hidden purpose, for she shook her head, and the movement of her lips suggested the words,

'No, no,—he will not return.'

Who can tell by what mysterious power she read his thoughts? Whence came this divination? Only too soon was he able to answer these questions.

The final moment of parting was come. He passed out of the garden-gate, mounted the rustic vehicle waiting for him, took the reins in his hand, whipped the horses, and was rapidly borne from the house where he

had left his heart, and where he had vowed to himself never to return.

In proportion as he increased the distance between himself and Madame Simon's house his spirits fell; and by the time he reached his own home a superhuman sadness weighed him down. All moral energy had deserted him; he no longer attempted to struggle against these fatal influences, but allowed himself to be vanquished without offering any farther resistance to the invisible enemy to which he was subjected.

Fever declared itself, and for several days the doctor who attended him doubted the possibility of his recovery. Thanks to his youth and the strength of his constitution, however, the patient was saved from death.

A fortnight passed—a fortnight of agony—in which, in his delirium, he saw incessantly the interwoven figures of Marguerite and Marie, pale, tearful, and ever with beseeching gestures calling on him to return to them.

At the end of that time, instead of sleeping the sleep of death, Lord Carleon woke to convalescence. Little by little his health returned; but with health there came back to him no peace of mind. He no longer lived—he vegetated merely.

His chateau seemed to him sombre and deserted; the lonely and desolate existence which he led there fed the melancholy which possessed him. All that had hitherto given him pleasure became odious; his horses languished in their stables, his dogs in their kennels.

The tedious winter past, spring arrived —that season of the year when Nature renews its youth, when the sap circulating in the young shoots bursts into vigorous growths, when the mild and perfumed breeze strays over the verdant earth, when the song of the birds preludes their happy pairing, when unknown flames soften the hardest hearts, and Nature, with all its voices, calls upon mankind to

give themselves to the universal impulse of love.

Lord Carleon needed no such command; he loved already, with only too much vehemence. And now, when all Nature seemed to conspire against the resolutions he had imposed upon himself, they gave way, like wax exposed to the heat of a furnace. He felt himself dominated by an irresistable fascination.

He felt that to struggle longer was vain; that he must submit to this supreme impulsion, or die; and he had not courage to face the dread alternative.

With an immense feeling of joy at his heart, yet not unmixed with fear, he once more approached Madame Simon's humble dwelling.

The aspect of the place was entirely changed since the day when, feeble and suffering, he had left it to return to his own home. Sombre and almost terrible as the landscape then appeared, it had now put on

a look of tender cheerfulness. Instead of the broad carpet of snow, out of which the fir-trees with their black-green foliage rose in dismal shapes, emerald-hued grass covered the ground, extending, like a bed of moss, up to the Dent du Chien, which had lost its stamp of savage horror, and stood out but as a picturesque point in the landscape.

But little heed was given to these objects by Lord Carleon, however. It was neither on the rocks, nor on the forests, nor on the distant views, that his devouring gaze was fixed as he drew near the dwelling of Madame Simon.

He had his gun upon his shoulder, and he was accompanied by two dogs. These animals reached the garden-gate a minute or two before their master, and exchanged a rapid and angry dialogue of yelps and growls; Fidèle, from the interior of the garden, seeming disposed to receive them as enemies.

As soon as Lord Carleon came in sight

the scene changed. Fidèle, with that instinct of his race which on occasion almost equals human intelligence, instantly recognised him as the guest of his mistresses, and his angry yells were at once turned into cries of affectionate welcome.

Lord Carleon opened the gate, and the delighted Fidèle literally leaped at his neck, licked his face and hands, and covered him with evidences of his gladness at seeing him again.

No one was in the garden. In the hall Lord Carleon found himself face to face with Marie. She recognised him, and uttered a low cry, in her surprise letting fall a jug of milk she was carrying.

Her face turned pale, she reeled, and would have fallen but that Lord Carleon sprang forward and caught her in his arms. Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, he pressed her to his bosom with passionate warmth.

The young girl gently disengaged herself

from his caress, and fixed her eyes upon his with an undefinable expression.

'You, monsieur!—you here?' she murmured.

'Yes, my dear Marie—I myself!' he replied.

'Is it possible?'

'Quite. Why are you so astonished?'

'I thought—I believed—you would never return.'

'But did I not promise?'

'It's true, you did,' said Marie, sadly shaking her head.

'Well, then?'

Marie made no reply. A cloud of sadness passed over her brow. Her eyes were half veiled by their long downcast lashes as she said:

'How glad the ladies will be to see you!'

The accent with which she pronounced these words struck Lord Carleon.

'And you, Marie—are you not also glad?' he asked.

'I, monsieur!' she replied, with a slight tone of bitterness. 'O, *I* am nobody!'

Few as these words were, they conveyed to his mind a complete revelation. They told him that he was loved by Marie; and he drew from them the almost assured belief that, during his long absence, the two young girls had talked together concerning him; that Marie had discovered in the innocent heart of Marguerite a love like her own; and that she had said humbly to herself that, in such a rivalry, she, a poor servant, must be vanquished.

As this conclusion presented itself to his mind, Lord Carleon felt himself thrilled by a sense of wild exultation. To be loved by both Marguerite and Marie was almost too great a happiness. It was incredible! Yet he believed it fully.

The soft voice of Marie broke upon the entrancement of this ecstatic vision.

'Will you not go up to the sitting-room, monsieur?' she said.

He started, as if awakened from a dream.

'Sitting-room!' he repeated vaguely.

'Unless you would prefer to wait in the garden.'

'Are the ladies not at home?'

'No, they are gone out.'

'For long?'

'I do not expect them back yet for an hour. Mademoiselle Marguerite and her mother have gone to the church of Valleboy, half a league from here.'

'I will wait for their return in the house, then,' he replied.

'You know the way, monsieur,' said Marie, moving aside to allow him to pass to the stairs.

'Will you not come with me?'

Marie's voice trembled as she replied,

'If you wish it, monsieur.'

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE SPELL.

Lord Carleon slowly ascended the stairs, holding by the hand-rail for support; for he felt himself overtaken by a feebleness as complete as that which had been upon him when he entered this house for the first time. Marie followed him.

The sitting-room was the chamber into which, months before, he had been carried almost dead. It served for the bed-room of the guests whom chance, at rare intervals, brought to the house of Madame Simon.

Nothing was changed in the furniture of this room, yet its aspect was no longer the same as in the days of the preceding winter. Through the wide-open windows a flood of sunlight poured in, making every

object splendid in the golden-hued atmosphere. Two vases, filled with fresh flowers of rich colours stood on the mantelpiece. The birds sang gaily without, and the soft perfumes of spring fell, as if caressingly, upon the senses. All combined to form a picture at once poetical and delightful, and, as Lord Carleon thought, never to be forgotten.

Placing his gun in a corner of the room, and disembarrassing himself of his game-bag, he seated himself by the window. His dogs remained in the garden, where they were given up to noisy gambols in company with Fidèle. From the place where he was seated he could see the garden-gate and the path along which Madame Simon and Marguerite would return.

Over the entire length of this path his eyes were turned inquiringly.

Marie followed the direction of this survey, and instantly comprehended its meaning.

'I told you, monsieur,' she said, in a low and timid voice, '*they* will not be back this hour.'

Lord Carleon raised his eyes to her face. The young girl was standing before him in an attitude of charming embarrassment and indecision.

Observing his look turned upon her, Marie dropped her eyes and appeared to regard with extreme attention the point of her little foot, of which assuredly she saw nothing. She played unconsciously with one of the plaits of her long black hair, which she wound about her fingers.

For several seconds Lord Carleon contemplated her with silent admiration.

Since his departure a complete transformation had been effected in her beauty. Into her wonderfully-beautiful face a new expression had come, the nature of which he did not as yet comprehend — in some sort, an idealisation. A pale and exquisite transparency had replaced the more lively

hue of her cheeks. A tender tinge of blue about her eyelids seemed to disclose the ravages of some hidden emotion—of some thought that had often chased sleep from her pillow.

Marie felt Lord Carleon's gaze penetrate to her heart, and a rosy tint, quickly deepening into scarlet, covered her neck, then her cheeks, and rose by degrees to the summit of her fair forehead.

Lord Carleon would willingly have relieved her from the modest embarrassment which he saw was becoming painful; but the only means that occurred to him at the moment were far from answering the purpose he had in view.

He noticed that round her neck she wore a narrow velvet ribbon, the end of which was concealed beneath her bodice.

'Marie, I see you have taken to wear a ribbon round your neck,' he said, in the most offhand tone he could assume, as if the remark were the most insignificant in the world.

Marie raised her eyes quickly, and carried her hand to the ribbon.

'This ribbon?' she inquired, blushing a deeper scarlet.

'Yes,' he replied.

The young girl made no answer, but her embarrassment appeared to be redoubled.

A feeling of jealousy, vague, but not to be mistaken, flashed upon Lord Carleon's mind.

'Will you not tell me what that ribbon is, and what you wear attached to it?' he demanded.

Perhaps the suspicion which had struck upon his heart betrayed itself in the tone of his voice; in any case, Marie answered with eager alacrity, as if he had given an imperious order,

'I will, I will, monsieur.'

At the same moment she drew from its soft sanctuary the concealed end of the ribbon, on which hung a small gold cross—

the same which he had given to her at the moment of his departure from Madame Simon's house.

A feeling of intense delight filled his entire being and shone in his looks. Marie saw this joy and partook of it; her face became radiant and her eyes sparkled like azure diamonds.

'You told me,' she murmured, 'to keep it—in memory of you.'

'Not in memory only—but for love of me.'

'I have kept it, as you see.'

'You have thought of me sometimes, then?'

'You are never out of my mind.'

These words escaped from the young girl's heart before she had time to bar their passage from her lips. But they were no sooner uttered than she was aware of all they had betrayed, and her confusion was redoubled.

For more than a minute neither spoke

again. But at length the silence into which they had fallen, and which was becoming painful to both, was broken.

The sound of a young girl's fresh voice was heard, singing sweetly a rustic ditty.

Lord Carleon recognised the voice without even looking in the direction whence it came. His look turned involuntarily to Marie.

An expression of agony was in the girl's face, which had become deadly pale. She too had recognised the approaching voice, and a shudder, such as may pass through the frame of a young lioness on seeing a rival draw near, convulsed her features.

The voice came nearer, and the garden-gate was opened. Then were heard the sounds of Fidèle's joyous caresses, mixed with the barking of Lord Carleon's dogs.

'Mamma, mamma!' cried Marguerite, for hers was the voice of the singer, 'some one has come.'

'Some one! — who can it be?' said Madame Simon. Then she called, 'Marie, Marie!'

The young girl, who had appeared as if she were changed into a statue, started at the call of her mistress. But before hurrying to obey the summons, she cried to Lord Carleon, in a low voice and in a distressed and suppliant tone,

'Do not say that you have seen me, monsieur. Say nothing about me.'

She fled from the room.

A light and rapid step sounded upon the stairs. A moment later and Marguerite appeared at the door left open by Marie.

As she stood in the doorway, a ray of sunlight entirely surrounded her, clothing her, as it were, in a mantle of gold. Her supple form and angelic visage, around which her brightly-lit blonde hair formed an aureole, were luminously relieved against the shadow of the passage behind her. She looked like the youthful Goddess of Spring

standing suddenly revealed to Lord Carleon's enraptured gaze.

She had not met Marie, and did not yet know what visitor was in the sitting-room. At sight of him joy and astonishment were at once reflected on her soft and pure features.

'Monsieur Reginald!' she cried. And she added not a word after pronouncing this name, which had plainly sprung from her heart to her lips.

Lord Carleon, on his side, remained speechless, trembling, and unable to take a single step forward to meet her.

Madame Simon, however, had followed her daughter, though at a slower pace, and now entered the room. On seeing Lord Carleon, an exclamation of pleasure escaped from her lips, and putting Marguerite gently aside, she welcomed him with truly maternal tenderness.

'You have not forgotten us, then?' she said. 'I thought you had done so, and said it was wrong of you; but now I see

how unjust I have been towards you, and beg your forgiveness.'

Lord Carleon made the best reply he could, and Madame Simon seated herself beside him, while Marguerite, to keep herself in countenance, pretended to rearrange the flowers on the mantelpiece.

'Why have you never let us hear from you?' inquired Madame Simon. 'We have often thought of you, and spoken of you, Marguerite and I; and sometimes we have felt hurt at your apparent indifference.'

'You have only been too good to me,' murmured Lord Carleon.

'We are both very fond of you; and sometimes it almost seems to me that you are the elder brother of my dear Marguerite.'

Lord Carleon took Madame Simon's hand and carried it to his lips with emotion.

'What have you been doing since you left us?' she asked.

'I have been like to die,' he replied.

'To die!' repeated Madame Simon, in a tone of bewilderment.

'Shortly after my return home I fell ill, and so seriously, that the doctors thought my case past hope.'

'And who tended you?'

'My servants.'

'And you had neither relative nor devoted friend by you?'

'No one.'

'Poor fellow!' cried Madame Simon, with touching compassion. 'But you ought to have sent me word, and I would have hastened to you. You know,' she added with a sweet smile, 'that I am a little bit of a nurse, and a little bit of a Sister of Charity besides. You are cured now, however, heaven be thanked, and there is nothing more to wish for, for you are quite well, are you not?'

'As you may see—I have come from my chateau on foot.'

'Shooting by the way?'

'Yes,—a little.'

'You remain still a sportsman, then?'

'More devotedly than ever.'

'O, these young men!' cried Madame Simon, holding up a finger in friendly reproof; 'no experience, however dreadful, checks their daring ardour! I'll be bound you would not hesitate to go again to the Fosse aux Loups to wait for bears?'

'Why not?'

'At the risk of a second catastrophe?'

'Is it not to the first that I owe the happiness of knowing you?'

'A very pretty speech;—I hope it is as sincere as it is pretty.'

'Do you doubt its sincerity?'

'No; for why should you not share the affection you have inspired?'

'Ah! my dear Madame Simon, you do me justice.'

'And how long are you going to stay with us?'

Lord Carleon was greatly embarrassed by this natural and apparently simple question.

'For the rest of the day,' he replied, hesitatingly; 'till the evening.'

'Is it possible you are serious? Where are you going to sleep?' demanded Madame Simon in a tone of surprise.

'With Jean Nicod the woodman,' he replied.

Madame Simon's face changed in expression.

'What have we done,' she cried, in a tone very different from that in which she ordinarily spoke, 'that you should prefer even to the hospitality of my humble roof that of Jean Nicod?'

'O, you cannot think that it is matter of preference, dear Madame Simon,' cried Lord Carleon. 'I fear to encroach too much upon your kindness—'

'Ah!' she cried in a tone of relief, the smile returning once more to her handsome

face; 'say no more—it is understood that you remain with us!'

'Since it is your wish.'

'You will give us all to-morrow?'

'So be it.'

'And all the rest of the week?'

'I really fear—'

'Some matter of importance recalls you home?'

'Absolutely nothing.'

'Then say *Yes*, and I'll forgive you for having thought of leaving us for the society of Jean Nicod the woodman.'

Lord Carleon desired nothing better than to remain. To do so was indeed the dearest of his wishes. He gave his promise therefore.

'And now,' continued Madame Simon, 'pray consider yourself here as perfectly at liberty as in your own home. If you like to go out shooting all day, do not for a moment hesitate to follow the bent of your inclination; by which means—be it said in

a whisper—we may come in for the pleasure of eating some of the game you kill.'

For a few moments nothing more was said; but at length Madame Simon continued, with a mysterious smile upon her lips:

'A day or two hence—to-morrow perhaps—my dear Monsieur Reginald, I shall have something to tell you.'

'Something?'

'A great secret—a family secret.'

'You awake in me the warmest possible interest, and "to-morrow" is an age off. Can you not tell it me to-day?' inquired Lord Carleon.

'No, not to-day; but to-morrow certainly,' replied Madame Simon.

Lord Carleon's eyes turned mechanically towards Marguerite. Her look was fixed upon his face, and she was white as a corpse. In vain he tried to divine the cause of her manifest emotion, which, however, was unremarked by her mother.

'You know this room?' continued Madame Simon; 'it shall be yours again. And now we will leave you to rest for a while.—Come, Marguerite.'

'Are you going to leave me?' said Lord Carleon.

'For the very necessary purpose of seeing to our larder. Do you think we contemplate letting you die of hunger?' replied Madame Simon, laughing.

He went to his game-bag, and drew from its depths a hare and a brace of partridges, which he had shot on the way that morning.

'So, so,' cried she, laughing; 'it's plain you doubted the resources of our humble kitchen, and therefore provided for yourself a splendid banquet. You were quite right, and will dine all the better for your foresight.'

Madame Simon left the room, and Marguerite followed her.

At the moment of quitting the chamber,

the young girl turned upon Lord Carleon a last look. She was sadder and paler than she had appeared an instant before, and the expression in her eyes was disconsolate and almost suppliant.

What was this apparent sorrowfulness, this unspoken prayer? Lord Carleon in vain repeated to himself these questions.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BETROTHED.

The day passed slowly. The dinner was dull. Madame Simon was the only one of the party whose good spirits were not forced. Marguerite scarcely spoke at all; and when she did so, it was evident that her mind was preoccupied. Marie had been weeping, as her red and swollen eyes too clearly attested.

Lord Carleon felt downcast and embarrassed, and was hardly able to summon sufficient presence of mind to reply to Madame Simon when she addressed him.

It was impossible for this good woman not to observe that something was the matter with her guest; but she believed he might still be under the depressing influence

of the illness through which he had lately passed, and pitied him without being in the least astonished.

Almost as soon as the dinner was ended he excused himself, on the ground of feeling fatigued by his long morning's walk, for retiring to his room.

'By all means, my dear Monsieur Reginald,' said Madame Simon. 'I can see that you are still weak; to-morrow, after you have rested, you will be stronger.'

'I hope so,' replied Lord Carleon; 'for to-day I am but a very dull and ungracious guest.'

But little sleep visited his eyes that night. A fever was in his blood; a vision of the two young girls, sleeping under the same roof with him, was constantly before him, making repose impossible.

The next morning he rose early, hoping to find calming influences in the fresh cool air of the mountains. As a means of turning his thoughts into an entirely different

channel, he sought the scene of poor Dominique's terrible death.

Arrived at the spot, he scarcely recognised it, so utterly was its aspect changed. The piled-up white blocks of the Dent du Chien were partly hidden under a coating of green mosses and lichens. The granite walls of the Fosse aux Loups were almost covered with a smiling vegetation. The abyss itself resembled a gigantic basket of verdure. From every bush came the song of a bird, from every green turf rose the voice of an insect; bees were taking their busy flight through the flower-scented air; and every object and every sound spoke of Nature's untainted freshness, of life and the joy of mere existence.

Lord Carleon endeavoured to find the spot where the unfortunate Dominique had trusted himself to the frail and treacherous support of the shattered pine-tree, a portion of the roots of which was still visible, jutting from a crevice in the wall of rock. Laying

himself flat upon the ground, he peered into the giddy depths, at the bottom of which a heap of rugged blocks marked the place where the poor old hunter had fallen.

Several venturesome men had descended with ropes, and recovered the old man's remains, to which christian burial had been given. The recollections which these events awoke in his mind served to divert him, to some extent at least, from the thoughts that were agitating his heart.

When he regained Madame Simon's house, he was still greatly depressed in spirit. He found the ladies waiting breakfast for him.

He was little less pale than Marguerite. As to Marie, her cheeks were more highly coloured than usual. The flush of fever gave a new and almost terrible splendour to her face. At times she avoided Lord Carleon's looks; at other times, on the contrary, she seemed to seek them; and when she did so, it almost appeared as if she were triumph-

ing in the momently-increasing dejection visible in Marguerite's looks and manner.

Breakfast was finished, and the party about to leave the dining-room, when a loud barking of the dogs in the garden was heard.

'A visitor,' remarked Madame Simon.

Upon Marguerite's features an expression of mental agony was painted, as the person referred to entered the room.

He appeared to be about five- or six-and-twenty. In height he was two or three inches taller than Lord Carleon; and his well-knit frame indicated extreme activity and extraordinary strength. His features were irregular, but bore the stamp of a masculine and vigorous beauty, of which daring resolution was the dominant expression. A thick growth of black hair surmounted his wide and thoughtful forehead and weather-bronzed face.

His costume was in accordance with his half-savage aspect. He wore high gaiters of soft leather, and a sort of jacket of a stout

ribbed material, known as coutil, drawn-in at the waist by a belt of undressed hide. On entering the room, he carelessly threw his hunting-cap of green cloth upon a chair.

Madame Simon held out her hand to him, and he raised it to his lips with a kind of rough gallantry, not by any means devoid of grace. He then shook hands with Marguerite, who appeared hardly able to sustain herself, and turned on Lord Carleon a look in which he read mistrust and distress.

Lord Carleon returned the young man's salutation with almost impertinent hauteur; but the incident escaped the notice of Madame Simon and possibly of her visitor.

'My dear Paul,' she said in an affectionate tone, 'this gentleman is Monsieur de Carleon, of whom you have so often heard us speak.' Then turning to Lord Carleon, she added, 'My dear Monsieur Reginald, allow me to introduce to you one of our

neighbours, Paul Duprat. You have so much in common — you are both young, both sportsmen, both good-hearted and intelligent—I hope you will become excellent friends.'

Lord Carleon again bowed; this time with such marked reserve as almost to startle Madame Simon.

'Good heavens! pray let me see you shake hands!' she cried. 'You are terribly ceremonious!'

Paul Duprat held out his hand, and Lord Carleon took it; but there was no cordiality in the act on either part. Each of the young men in fact divined that in the other he had an adversary, an enemy. However, each was as yet sufficiently master of himself to keep all expression of hostility from his looks.

'You intend to spend the whole of the day with us, Paul, I hope?' said Madame Simon.

'I had intended to do so,' he replied; 'but—'

'But what?' demanded Madame Simon, in a tone of surprise.

'You have a visitor; and I fear I may be in the way.'

'In other words, a new acquaintance alarms you. That's quite like you, you wild mountaineer! But pray try and understand that you couldn't possibly have come at a more desirable moment; and that if you had *not* come, I should have written to-day to invite you.'

Paul Duprat made no answer.

The little party went out into the garden, and seated themselves in a rustic bower, overgrown with honeysuckle and eglantine, that filled the air with their delicious fragrance. Madame Simon and Marguerite took their needlework with them; and all, more or less, fell into talk.

It would have been impossible for Lord Carleon, without unpardonable bad taste, to refrain from speaking with Paul Duprat. This young man greatly displeased him, it

is true; but he had done nothing actually offensive, and it would have been difficult for Lord Carleon to explain even to himself the foundation of the antipathy he felt for him.

The conversation therefore became general. The perils to which sportsmen are often exposed were spoken of, and Madame Simon made Lord Carleon relate the circumstances of his tragic expedition to the Fosse aux Loups.

On his side, Paul Duprat recounted several wild adventures, to his own share in which Lord Carleon did not fail to observe he modestly sank all prominent reference. But in spite of this modest reticence, it was easy to see that Paul Duprat had on many occasions given proof of high courage and wonderful address.

Madame Simon warmly applauded the young hunter, and pressed him with questions, evidently with the intention of placing him before Lord Carleon in the most favourable light.

During these recitals Lord Carleon watched Marguerite. She was not listening to anything that was being said; and her undisguised indifference filled his heart with joy. Paul Duprat, on the contrary, appeared to be painfully affected from the same cause. Now and then Madame Simon slightly knit her brows, as her eyes rested upon her daughter; but these clouds quickly passed away.

Afternoon arrived. Marguerite and her mother returned to the house to see to the preparations for dinner. Lord Carleon and Paul Duprat were thus left together.

The masks they had been wearing instantly fell from their faces; it was useless to keep them on any longer, and from the moment of the ladies' departure, not another word was spoken. Lord Carleon plucked a few blossoms of honeysuckle and raised them to his nose, for the mere purpose of doing something that might serve to keep him in countenance; while Paul Duprat

drew from his pocket a short pipe, and fell to smoking with a grave intensity worthy of a Flemish beer-drinker. In this way they passed the time till dinner was announced as ready.

Not one of the party derived any pleasure from the meal. What conversation there was, was forced and spasmodic, consisting of little more than replies to observations addressed by Madame Simon to Lord Carleon or Paul Duprat. Marguerite hardly once broke silence. The two men, as if by tacit agreement, neither spoke to nor looked at one another. Marie, who waited at table, was pale, and moved about the room nervously, as if under the influence of terror.

At length the day—which had seemed interminable to more than Lord Carleon—was drawing to its close. Night was slowly approaching, and Paul Duprat took his leave of the ladies.

In obedience to the request of Madame

Simon, the two men once more took each other's hands; but the grasp of each was even less friendly than that of the morning had been.

Paul Duprat departed along a road leading to the mountains; and every step which increased his distance from the house seemed to lift a portion of a heavy burthen from Lord Carleon's heart.

As soon as the young mountaineer was out of sight, Madame Simon motioned Marguerite to return to the house, and then, taking Lord Carleon's arm, led him back to the arbour in which a great part of the day had been spent.

'Monsieur Reginald,' she said, as soon as they were seated, 'we may consider you our friend, may we not?'

'Do you doubt it?' he asked.

'No,' she replied; 'and as a proof, I am going to show you how much confidence I place in you. I told you yesterday I should confide a secret—a family secret—to you. But

first promise to answer me with perfect frankness—to speak to me exactly as you think.'

Lord Carleon felt extremely uneasy under the influence of this exordium, and his heart began to beat heavily. He gave the promise demanded, however.

'I have introduced to you Monsieur Paul Duprat,' continued Madame Simon; 'you have talked together, you have passed two hours alone with him, and have had time, if not to form a complete judgment, at least an opinion, as to his person and character. Tell me what you think of him.'

So completely unexpected was this interrogation, that, for a moment, Lord Carleon was dumbfounded by it. Recovering his self-control as quickly as he could, however, before answering, he asked:

'Why have you put this question to me, my dear Madame Simon?'

'I will tell you why presently; first answer me, and above all frankly, as you have promised.'

'You wish it?'

'I beg it.'

'I obey, then,' replied Lord Carleon. 'Monsieur Duprat utterly displeases me.'

'Displeases you utterly!' repeated Madame Simon in astonishment. 'Why?'

'Indeed I cannot explain why. Only, the moment I set eyes upon him, I felt towards him a sudden antipathy, which our slight intercourse has not in the least degree tended to diminish.'

'That is strange!' cried Madame Simon.

'Not stranger than many innate sympathies, which are without serious motive, but against which one often cannot defend oneself.'

'Yet Paul Duprat is a young man of agreeable appearance,—in fact, he may pass as decidedly good-looking.'

'No doubt.'

'Frank and honest?'

'I am quite sure of that.'

'Highly courageous?'

'Of that I have not the least doubt.'

'Has he done anything which without his wish, or perhaps without his knowledge, has offended you?'

'Nothing whatever.'

'But, my dear Monsieur Reginald, without some reason, good or bad, small or great, how can you have come to dislike him so?'

'My dislike *is* without reason, no doubt, but it is none the less absolute.'

'I cannot tell you how much what you say afflicts me,' murmured Madame Simon.

'But, my dear madame,' cried Lord Carleon, 'what can it possibly matter to you whether I like or dislike this young man, whom I have but casually seen, and whom I may perhaps never meet again?'

'This young man,' answered Madame Simon in a low grave tone, 'will shortly become my son.'

'Your son!' repeated Lord Carleon,

trembling violently as he realised the sense of her words.

'He is betrothed to Marguerite.'

Lord Carleon reeled in his chair as if he had been struck by a bullet. Fortunately it was nearly dark, and Madame Simon was not able to remark the paleness and agitation of his features. It was some few seconds before he could recover himself, and his lips involuntarily re-formed the words which had struck him to the heart—

'Betrothed to Marguerite?'

'Yes,' replied Madame Simon; 'the marriage will take place in about four months from this time, and I would have given much to have had my son-in-law your friend.'

'And Marguerite?' he demanded in husky and almost indistinct tones; 'does she love him?'

Through the increasing darkness he could see that Madame Simon shook her head sadly.

'Does your daughter love him?' he repeated, in tones that snatched something of assurance even from doubt.

'No,' replied Madame Simon quietly.

The word sent a thrill of joy through Lord Carleon's heart.

'No, she does not love him,' repeated Madame Simon; 'but she esteems him and feels for him a strong friendship, I am sure.'

'But why then do you give her to him?'

'Because, though she does not love him now, with such regard as she feels for him, love may come after marriage; it is often the more solid for coming a little late.'

It did not for an instant occur to good Madame Simon, that, in speaking thus, she was saying anything that could touch the heart of her guest and friend. The idea that her daughter—the fortuneless daughter of a poor lieutenant of gendarmerie—might cast her eyes on a man so rich as Monsieur de Carleon, as she called him (for Lord Carleon had never communicated to her more

than the fact of his being the owner of the chateau de Carleon), or that he could ever think of such an unequal alliance, had never presented itself to her mind.

On receiving this assurance, that Marguerite felt for Paul Duprat nothing more than esteem and friendship, Lord Carleon's spirits were relieved of a great part of their oppression.

'My dear Madame Simon,' he ventured to say, 'you have honoured me with your confidence, and claimed that I should speak frankly to you; it appeared to me, then, that your daughter was very downcast to-day.'

'You remarked it?'

'And you too, did you not?'

'Yes, but it does not make me at all uneasy. It is a mere young girl's caprice—a cloud that comes and goes without her knowing why or wherefore. Yesterday, for example, before your arrival, she was as gay as a bird; and I remember that, all the way

from church, she sang like a lark a kind of song, of which she has composed both the words and the music.'

'I heard her singing it,' murmured Lord Carleon.

'It is very pretty, is it not?'

'It is charming.'

'I am glad you think that. Well, five minutes after your arrival, all her good spirits had left her, and she is not more cheerful even now. Yet to-morrow morning, perhaps, you will see her as bright and cheerful as ever. But, under any circumstances, you will not, I am sure, speak a word before her of what I have been telling you; nothing is so embarrassing to a young girl as to hear her future husband spoken of.'

'You may safely rely upon my discretion,' replied Lord Carleon with scarcely-concealed bitterness.

'It is getting late, and the night-air is cool,' remarked Madame Simon; 'will you come indoors?'

'I will rejoin you in a few minutes.'

'We shall be waiting for you in the house,' she said, as she turned and left him.

Engaged to Paul Duprat! Betrothed! The worst he could have suspected. No, not the worst; for though designed to be this rustic's bride, she did not *love* him! How that assurance elated his heart! All beyond was vague, unresolved, unquestioned even: why should it not be so? His love for Marguerite was yet but a sweet dream; the waking hour, come when it would, would come all too soon! He would do naught to accelerate it. From these reflections he was suddenly aroused by feeling a burning hand pressed upon one of his own, while a breathless voice whispered in his ear:

'Leave your door open. I *must* speak with you to-night.'

CHAPTER VII.

MARIE'S PERIL.

The speaker was Marie; and she had disappeared before the sound of her voice had died in Lord Carleon's ears.

Vainly he sought to fathom the intention of the young girl in thus addressing him. What could she have to say to him of such urgency as to impel her to take a course so questionable as that of secretly visiting his room in the night-time? He had barely noticed her nervous manner while she was in attendance on the party at dinner, the task of watching over his own conduct having absorbed his whole attention. But even if it had been otherwise, her agitation would have afforded him no clue to its origin. In vain he recalled the incidents of his arrival

on the previous day—of her obvious delight at his return, of the sudden change that had come over her at the sound of Marguerite's voice, and of her anxious request to him, not to speak of his having seen her; nothing helped him to solve the mystery of her present purpose.

Upon rejoining Madame Simon and Marguerite in the house, his appearance of abstraction and uneasiness was so marked as to cause Madame Simon to inquire whether he was ill. Seizing the pretext thus offered, he replied that he felt extremely fatigued; and retired to his room.

It was but just ten o'clock, and he might have to wait a long time for the arrival of Marie. To quell his impatience and burning curiosity, he opened one of the windows, and rested with his elbows on the sill, looking out into the garden.

The night was magnificent; the sky spangled with a myriad of glittering stars. All day-sounds had ceased, and only the

love-signal of the cricket and the enraptured hymn of the nightingale were to be heard. The temperature was soft and mild, and a light breeze, laden with the perfume of flowers, caressed the cheeks of Lord Carleon as with the touch of a woman's breath.

Two hours passed, and he had heard the distant clock of the church of Valleboy strike twelve some minutes before, when the door of his room, which he had left unfastened according to the young girl's direction, softly turned on its hinges, and Marie entered with a timid and embarrassed air.

She was very pale, and her limbs appeared to tremble; the indecision of her bearing contradicting the boldness of the resolution which had impelled her to take so dangerous a course.

Lord Carleon hastened to close the door behind her, then took her hand and led her to a seat, upon which she sank rather than sat.

A deep blush suffused her neck and face, making her beauty more splendid in Lord Carleon's eyes. Unable to retain the mastery of his emotions, he threw himself at her feet, and the words of a passionate declaration of his love sprang to his lips.

Marie raised her eyes, and the expression in his face revealed to the instinct of her modesty what was passing in his mind. She trembled for a moment; but then, by a strong effort, recovered her self-control, and in a low and almost pained voice cried:

'Monsieur Reginald!'—

'Dear Marie!' was all he could reply.

'You must not speak to me so—you *must* not!—but listen to what I have to tell you. I told you this evening that I must speak with you to-night,' she continued. 'It is true. What I have to say to you is very serious—terrible; but for that, heaven knows I should not have wished to seek you here—should not have dared to do so.'

'Something serious — terrible!' he repeated in a tone of perplexity.

'Monsieur Reginald, you are in danger.'

'Danger—of what?'

At first she appeared to hesitate; but after a moment of reflection and incertitude, said abruptly and with singular energy:

'You love Mademoiselle Marguerite.'

Lord Carleon started, but was silent.

'You love my young mistress,' she repeated with yet more assurance.

'Marie, I swear to you—' he cried.

'Do not swear, Monsieur Reginald,' she said, stopping him. 'Do not even deny what I see and feel. You might as well attempt to prove to me that it is not now the middle of the night, as that you do not love my young mistress.'

Marie spoke with absolute conviction, with a certainty which Lord Carleon at once attributed to the penetration with which jealousy is so mysteriously gifted. He made no reply.

'Yes, you love her,' she continued; 'and why should you not? Marguerite Simon is made to be loved—and perhaps to love. I know—I know, you could not help loving her; but it is on account of this love that you are in danger, from which I would preserve you.'

Lord Carleon tried to force a smile to his features, as he replied:

'If the danger no more exists than the love, I have not much cause of alarm.'

'Again! — again you deny it!' cried Marie. 'Monsieur Reginald, will you swear to me on this cross,' and she held out to him the little golden present he had made to her as a *gage d'amour*, 'that you do not love Marguerite? No,' she cried, suddenly putting the cross into her bosom; 'no,—swear it to me on your honour, and I will believe you.'

Lord Carleon's soul was not fashioned to the easy management of conscience common in the corrupted society of the present

day; he had not yet, in spite of his early experiences, brought himself to believe that an oath solemnly made to a woman carries with it no obligation of fulfilment, or that where love is concerned a lie is innocent, if it be not actually justifiable. He refrained from taking the oath demanded by Marie.

'You see!' she cried hoarsely. After a moment of what appeared to be a struggle with anguish, she continued: 'It could hardly have been otherwise; but your love is a great misfortune! — A young man came here to-day.'

'Monsieur Duprat?'

'You dislike him—and he hates you!'

'How do you know that?'

'Because I have seen the looks you have turned on one another.'

'But you may have been misled by those looks.'

'*Have* they misled me?'

Again Lord Carleon hesitated to answer with a falsehood.

'Monsieur Paul Duprat,' continued Marie, 'loves Marguerite—has loved her truly and with all the power of his heart for years; and her mother has promised that she shall become his wife.'

'But does Marguerite love Paul Duprat?' cried Lord Carleon.

'You know well that she does not,' Marie answered; 'and Monsieur Paul knows it too.'

'Why, then the marriage is impossible, that is all.'

'It *was* not impossible—but it has become so.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, that if you had not returned, Marguerite would have been resigned; *now* she will resist.'

'Do you really think so?' demanded Lord Carleon, with a feeling of savage satisfaction.

'I am sure of it. Monsieur Paul Duprat understands perfectly that you are his rival.

It is to your presence that he will assuredly attribute the refusal of his betrothed. His rage will equal his mortification. He will burn to revenge himself; and it is on you that his vengeance will fall.'

Lord Carleon could not restrain the impulse to laugh. Marie looked at him with bewilderment.

'You laugh!' she cried, with an accent of terror. 'Good heavens, Monsieur Reginald, do you not understand me?—I tell you that is on you that his vengeance will fall!'

'Surely you do not expect me to attach any serious importance to Monsieur Duprat's vengeance?' he said.

'Ah!—You do not know him; that is easily seen!' cried Marie. 'He is a true mountaineer. His father is rich; but his grandfather was a smuggler, who thought as little of killing a man as I think of plucking a flower. Paul Duprat has his grandfather's blood in his veins. Take care, Mon-

sieur Reginald! for the love of heaven, take care! If he finds that you are an obstacle to his love, he will destroy you. If he swears to kill you, you will die by his hand — struck down from some ambush perhaps, as you would shoot a wild-beast!'

'My dear Marie,' he replied, half smiling, 'it appears to me that you have somehow conceived a truly formidable idea of your young mistress's betrothed.'

'It is because I know Paul Duprat,— and because I feel,' she replied in a hoarse and tremulous whisper, 'that love and jealousy may drive their victim to the commission even of terrible crimes.'

The deep emotion with which she spoke these significant words touched Lord Carleon to the heart.

'What would you have me do?' he asked.

Marie thought that he was about to cede to her prayer, and a smile of relief and gratitude illumined her features as she answered eagerly:

'The only thing that can turn aside the danger hanging over you—you must leave this house at once; you must quit this part of the country—and never return to it.'

'Quit this country—never to return? And would *you* consent, Marie, never to see me again?'

She pressed her hand upon her heart, as if to still its wild beating, and grew deadly pale.

'To save you—to save you,' she murmured, 'yes!—I would consent.'

A scarlet blush once more covered her face, and her eyes filled with tears. The full and complete story of her love had escaped from her heart in those few words of passionate abnegation. Lord Carleon would have folded her to his bosom; but with a low cry she evaded his embrace, and fled from the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

EVIL COUNSELS.

Doubtless, had Lord Carleon's heart been free of the divine image of Marguerite, the striking beauty of Marie, combined with her innocence and her love, so little disguised, would have exercised an influence over him too powerful to be controlled; but the love he felt for Marguerite was all-engrossing so long as Marie was not before his eyes.

Yet, at this very time, the idea of marriage never for a moment entered his mind, imbued as it was with aristocratic prejudices which would have made him consider a union with Marguerite Simon a *mésalliance.*

Accustomed as he had been from infancy to look upon the portraits of his ancestors he knew that each one of the lords of Car-

leon had joined his arms to some heiress of noble lineage, and it would have appeared to him absolutely impossible for him to give his name to a girl of humble and obscure origin.

But, nevertheless, he shrank from the idea of bringing sorrow into Madame Simon's home. Once again flight presented itself as the only honourable resource left to him.

At breakfast, on the morning following his secret interview with Marie, he announced his intention of returning at once to the chateau de Carleon; and he observed that Madame Simon made no attempt to dissuade him. At the same time he remarked that she cast upon the pale face of her daughter a look full of sadness and commiseration.

No doubt she had discovered that a fatal sentiment, growing from hour to hour, had implanted itself in the poor girl's heart. Her manner was still polished and affec-

tionate towards Lord Carleon; but he felt that a change had come upon her regard for him, and that she did not desire to retard his departure by one moment.

Before noon he was on his way to his own home, with a cheerless future before him.

He had passed about two months of dull and purposeless existence, when one morning his valet delivered to him a letter in an unknown handwriting.

This unexpected missive came from an old French gentleman who had been the intimate associate of the late Lord Carleon during the most irregular portions of that nobleman's most irregular life. It expressed the writer's desire to make acquaintance with the son of his old friend, and his intention of visiting the chateau de Carleon on the following day.

Lord Carleon had heard vaguely of the character of his father's friend, the Chevalier Philippe de Villiers; and though he instinc-

tively shrank from association with such a man, he was fain to admit that his visit would at least serve to break the dull monotony of the life he was then leading.

Punctual to the time he had appointed, the Chevalier arrived in a post-chaise at the chateau de Carleon. He was a brisk little man, exhibiting a turbulent joviality of manner that still belongs to the old French character.

After saluting Lord Carleon in the French fashion several times, and quite as if he were in company with a man of his own age, he passed his arm through that of his host, and led him into the park, where, after speaking for a few minutes on the subject of his late friend and one or two members of the family of Lord Carleon, he plunged into the recital of a crowd of stories and anecdotes more or less libertine in spirit.

This went on until dinner was announced, and they seated themselves at table.

The Chevalier tasted all the dishes, did honour to all the wines, and complimented infinitely the talents of the cook. As the meal advanced, the old roué's spirits frothed and sparkled like champagne; but it was only faintly responded to by his host, for whom such a kind of gaiety had no charm, at least not at that moment.

This want of sympathy was at length noticed by the Chevalier, who, with a protean power of adapting himself to all occasions, immediately changed the character of his conversation, and became at once affectionate, insinuating, even almost paternal. In short, by the most artfully-calculated means, he soon succeeded in drawing from Lord Carleon the causes of his preoccupation—indeed, of all that had happened in the house of Madame Simon.

Monsieur de Villiers' eyes sparkled, and his whole face was lit up with an expression of joyousness, when Lord Carleon had finished his confession. He was wholly in his

element. He had before him a young man trembling on the brink of a moral abyss, and his was not a hand to be stretched forth to save him.

'My dear boy!' he cried, 'allow me to call you my dear boy; I used to call your father before you "my dear boy," though he was as old as myself in years—ha! ha! in years!—and the words leave a pleasant taste in my mouth, such as the infamous dishes of the *soi disant* cooks of this half-dead generation hardly by any chance ever do! My dear boy! I believe in luck, which is among the very few credulities that remain to me; I believe it was luck that brought me into your neighbourhood, at this particular time, when you were so thoroughly in want of the sort of friendly counsel that nobody can give you better, if so well as myself.'

Lord Carleon, in appropriate terms, expressed his indebtedness to Fortune.

'By the time a man has lived long

enough in this most unquestionably best of all possible worlds to be obliged to carry spectacles upon his nose, he has learned—if he isn't a fool—to know a good many things by sign and by analogy: without fretting my old nose, therefore, by pinching it with my spectacles, I can see and understand your position perfectly. My dear boy, you have had a narrow escape!'

'Escape? I do not quite follow you, Chevalier,' said Lord Carleon.

'Most likely,' replied the Chevalier, taking a full pinch of snuff out of an enamelled box. 'The fowler who knows his craft does not leave his net exposed; the fowler who set her trap for you knew what she was about, I make no doubt, and carefully hid her springes from your sight.'

'O, my dear Chevalier, you do not know Madame Simon,' exclaimed Lord Carleon, 'or you would never for a moment think her capable of so unworthy a design.'

'At your age I should have made pre-

cisely the same remark — clinging to my fondest illusions with the whole tenacity of my inexperience; at two-and-twenty it is our noble privilege to believe that every thing is exactly what we find it most agreeable to think it, and no millstone is too thick for our *amour propre* to see through clearly.'

'But there is such a thing as prejudice, to which—if you will pardon my saying it —age is especially liable.'

'One of the strongest of the prejudices of experience—with which age ought to be synonymous, but which, I grant you, it is not always—is in favour of the real to the ideal, the assured to the speculative. A young fellow who has never seen but half a dozen pretty girls in the course of his life, as far as it has gone, falls over head and ears in love with the prettiest, and inevitably thinks her an angel; give his judgment the benefit of ten years' experience, and, almost as inevitably, it will pronounce the

charmer's greatest charm to be her obvious affinity with the ante-angelical. Your Marguerite has had the fortune, or misfortune, to be born some time after the Age of Innocence — which, by the way must have been an abominably dull time for men of fashion—and, depend upon it, has distinct notions on the subject of coronets; having had the benefit of a fond mother's best instruction to guide her in the way she should go whenever Fortune happens to throw a youth at once eligible and confiding in her path.'

'Good heavens, the thing seems impossible!' cried Lord Carleon. 'Marguerite is simplicity itself.'

'My dear boy! my dear boy! you have been in greater danger even than I imagined,' continued the Chevalier; 'positively your credulity alarms me. Simplicity! why, where the deuce do you suppose any girl in these days could have come possessed of it? Simplicity! it has not existed in the

world since Eve's first grand-daughters had home their first petticoats from the milliner's. What you call simplicity is the commonest of all baits to hide the matrimonial hook. The type of Arcadian simplicity is an apple-cheeked country girl, who will surrender for nothing less than the title of "my lady," when a "my lord" happens to cheapen the commodity!'

'But I feel sure—if you knew her and her mother—'

'If I *knew* them? bless you, my dear boy, I *know* them! I seem from your effusive description, to have known their ancestors before them! They are of a pattern; they are as distinct as the flavour of a fresh truffle! What would you have? Do you suppose that Madame Simon, dragging out a wretched existence on the pension of a lieutenant of gendarmerie, does not calculate the value of such a chance of bettering her fortune as you offer?—and—positively I think I am blushing while I ask

you such questions—do you think her such an idiot as not to try and make security doubly sure, by getting you to marry her girl?'

'You forget one thing, Chevalier, one important point against your theory.'

'Do I? I shall be surprised if I find it is so,' replied the Chevalier, taking another full pinch of snuff. 'What do you suppose it to be?'

'You appear to me to have forgotten what I have told you à propos of Paul Duprat—that he is positively engaged to Marguerite.'

The Chevalier laughed, not heartily, but with a short, dry sort of half chuckle.

'A comedy without actors, my dear boy, is suggestive of a yet unheard-of ingenuity: the character intended to be played by Monsieur Duprat is as little original as the plot in which Madame Simon plays the worldly-wise mother, and your Marguerite the well-instructed *ingénue;* the *dénoûment*

of which is to be the equally happy circumvention of the infatuated young English nobleman, and triumph of rustic virtue and "simplicity"! Marguerite Simon once safely endowed with the title of Lady Carleon, Monsieur Paul Duprat's broken heart will, no doubt, speedily mend itself, and Monsieur Paul Duprat's name will, perhaps, as speedily figure over the door of a desirable village cabaret at present to let. Psha! my dear boy, don't look so savage. As your devilishly clever, though decidedly unpolished Will Shakespeare says, "One man in his time plays many parts;" and he might have added, that, in playing those parts he must necessarily see a good deal of the doings of other actors in the drama of life. At my age, it goes almost without saying that, as well as having played a good many parts, I must have noted how a good many others have played their parts; the *dramatis personæ* in your comedy of "Village Innocence, or the Credulous Noble-

man," are familiar to me, every one of them, I pledge you my word, as the characters in my favourite *Tartuffe !*'

In this spirit the struggle was long continued, and renewed several times. The Chevalier's reasoning was far from being immediately conclusive to Lord Carleon's mind; but the diabolical influence of his views of life took effect nevertheless. His language had the glitter of the serpent, that seems to caress its victim the better to compass its destruction. Without wounding the susceptibilities of his listener, he, one by one, scoffed down all the beliefs of his youth, demolished all his illusions. Finally he took the young man's soul, as it were, and softened it in the fire of passion, which he excited with his infernal breath; he then kneaded it like molten wax, and gave it back made more or less after the pattern of his own.

Monsieur de Villiers spent three days at the chateau de Carleon. An hour after his

departure, Lord Carleon was on his way once more to the house of Madame Simon, writhing under the galling belief of having been ensnared—of having been led like a greenhorn into a baited trap.

CHAPTER IX.

CONFRONTED.

By the time Lord Carleon had reached the hut of the woodman Jean Nicod, where he intended to pass the night, the evening was far advanced; therefore he deferred till the following morning his visit to Madame Simon's house.

Early the next day he presented himself. Madame Simon was alone in her garden at the moment when he passed through the gate, and raised her eyes with such a look of astonishment as almost to imply that she did not recognise him. She advanced a few steps to receive him, however, and the reception she gave him was polite and somewhat ceremonious, but far from the tender and affectionate welcome he had been accustomed to receive from her. Her

embarrassed expression told him, as plainly as spoken words, that his presence was undesired.

This attitude, which so ill accorded with the odious suspicions engendered in his mind by the Chevalier, might have enlightened him, but it failed to do so. Resentful of the stratagem of which he imagined himself to be the plaything, he determined to take no notice of the ill grace of his reception.

Without invitation he unslung his game-bag, and ascended the stairs towards the room which he had before occupied. On the landing-place he met Marie.

'Monsieur Reginald!—good heavens!' she cried.

He would have taken her hand, but she shrank from his touch almost with affright, murmuring:

'O, monsieur!—you went away from here, leaving sorrow behind you. Are you returned to bring misery and despair?'

He endeavoured to detain her, but she refused to answer his questions, and disappeared in one of the passages of the house.

These words of the young girl fell heavily upon his heart, and rung in his ears like a presage of ill-omen; but he drove away the impression, and descended to the garden to rejoin Madame Simon.

She appeared careworn and absorbed. She had gathered some flowers, which she held in her left hand, and from which she mechanically plucked the petals, and dropped them from her fingers without heeding their wavering flight to the ground.

The sound of Lord Carleon's steps recalled her to herself. A sad smile showed itself upon her lips, and she uttered a few insignificant sentences, the sense of which was not very clear either to herself or to him.

After a moment of irresolution, he inquired about the health of Marguerite, putting a great restraint upon his emotion, so

that his voice should not tremble in pronouncing her name. But possibly the effort was not completely successful; for Madame Simon turned upon him a fixed and penetrating look, which, though it lasted but a quarter of a moment, probed to his heart.

'Marguerite is very unwell, and has not left her room for several days,' she answered briefly.

'Good heavens!' he cried; 'I hope she is in no danger?'

'I hope not,' replied Madame Simon, with still greater brevity of tone.

'Is your daughter's indisposition likely to delay her marriage?' he asked hesitatingly.

'Who knows?' she murmured; 'who knows whether the marriage will take place at all?'

'You told me that it was arranged; that the period of it was fixed.'

'Since then all is changed. Marguerite refuses to marry Monsieur Duprat,' she re-

plied, again turning upon Lord Carleon a sustained and penetrating look.

'Why does she refuse?' he asked, with downcast eyes, unable to meet Madame Simon's scrutinising gaze.

'Marguerite will not tell me, and I can only surmise the reason.'

He felt his lip curl involuntarily, but these words were pronounced in such a freezing tone, that he had not courage to push farther his inquiries on the subject, to which they had, as it were, set a formal close.

At that moment Marie approached her mistress and informed her that breakfast was ready; and Lord Carleon and Madame Simon entered the house together. Whether it was that Marguerite was really ill, or that she kept her room by command of her mother, she did not appear at table, and the meal was partaken by Madame Simon and her guest alone.

It passed sadly enough, and when it

was over Madame Simon retired to join her daughter. Marie carefully avoided meeting Lord Carleon, and the icy mantle of discouragement weighed heavily upon him.

The hours that followed seemed interminable, and he had begun, in spite of the Chevalier's teaching, to think of retiring from a scene become so dreary and unpromising, when he noticed outside the garden-gate a ragged sheep-boy making sounds and motions to attract his attention.

Thinking the boy was a beggar appealing to his charity, at the same time somewhat surprised at the little fellow's bold and almost impudent familiarity, he was about to throw him a piece or two of money, but the boy stopped him with the question:

'Did you come here this morning?'

'Yes. Why do you ask?' replied Lord Carleon.

'Because I want to know; I've got something to give you,' answered the boy saucily.

As he spoke, he handed him a large letter, carefully folded and sealed, and addressed in a firm bold handwriting.

'Who sent you with this letter?' demanded Lord Carleon.

'You'll find that out when you've read it,' replied the boy.

Lord Carleon broke the seal and read the contents, which were to this effect:

'You are called a gentleman, monsieur, and from my childhood I have been under the impression that nobleness of heart always accompanies nobleness of race. I do not doubt that you will deal with me in such a manner as not to destroy this belief. I feel for you a profound hatred, because I feel that you have deeply injured me; and I have a terrible reckoning therefore to demand of you. If I were a Corsican, I should waylay you, hidden behind some bush, and my gun would do me justice. But this is not the kind of justice that I require; I seek a frank and loyal explanation,

such as becomes two men of honour, who respect even while they hate one another. I do not suppose that you will refuse me this explanation, and shall await you until six o'clock at the foot of the big oak at the corner of the Bois des Nonnes, a quarter of a league from the house in which this letter finds you. Tell my messenger whether you will come—*yes or no*.'

The letter was signed 'Paul Duprat.'

'Well, what am I to tell him?' asked the boy, as soon as he saw that Lord Carleon had read the letter through.

'Tell Monsieur Duprat that I will not keep him waiting; that I will set out at once for the place he has named,' replied Lord Carleon.

The boy set off at a run; and five minutes later Lord Carleon took the shortest road to the Bois des Nonnes.

On reaching the spot indicated, he found Paul Duprat seated on a large moss-covered stone, and absorbed in a deep reverie, his

elbows resting on his knees, and his face hidden in his hands. Lord Carleon stopped when he had reached him within three or four paces. Paul Duprat raised his head.

His face was frightfully pale, dark shadows surrounded his eyes, and his weather-bronzed forehead was marked with premature wrinkles. The look he turned upon Lord Carleon revealed an implacable hatred. But by a wonderful exercise of self-control, he banished from his countenance all expression of his inner feelings, and rising, saluted Lord Carleon with cold politeness.

'Monsieur Duprat,' said Lord Carleon, producing the letter he had received from the sheep-boy, 'in this letter you require an explanation between us; you speak of the hatred with which I have inspired you, and add that you have a terrible reckoning to demand of me. Will you favour me by explaining what all this means?—for really I do not at present comprehend.'

'I *will* explain,' he replied coldly.

'As briefly and quickly as you can, if you please.'

Paul Duprat leaped over the narrow ditch which formed the boundary of the wood, and beckoned Lord Carleon to follow him.

'Where are you going?' inquired the latter.

'A hundred paces into the forest,' replied Paul Duprat.

'Cannot we talk as well here?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Because here we are not secure from interruption, and I do not wish anybody to see us.'

For a moment the idea that Paul Duprat sought to draw him into the forest for the purpose of murdering him crossed Lord Carleon's mind, and he hesitated to follow; but reflection quickly banished this apprehension, which, if it was ill-founded, would be an insult to his rival, and might in any case

call down upon himself a suspicion of cowardice. He followed Paul Duprat, therefore.

After moving a little way into the forest, Paul Duprat stopped in a kind of opening among the trees.

'Now,' he said, 'we can talk without the chance of being overheard. First let me ask of you to summon up your patience, for what I have to say will take some time in the saying, and you must hear me out.'

'Be good enough to abridge as much as possible what you have to say,' said Lord Carleon, in a slightly supercilious tone.

Paul Duprat darted at him a look as bitter and vengeful as that which he had first turned upon him; but again he quelled the expression in his face, and replied:

'I'll try.'

'Accept my thanks,' said Lord Carleon, in the same tone.

'Monsieur de Carleon, I love Mademoiselle Simon,' began Paul Duprat.

'Possibly. What then, my dear Monsieur Duprat?'

'I was to have married her in less than two months from the present time.'

'And are you not going to do so?'

'No.'

'May I ask why?'

'Why!' he cried, in an accent of savage rage. 'Do *you* ask me why?'

'I certainly did ask the question.'

'You do not know why I am not going to marry Marguerite Simon?'

'I really have not that advantage.'

'I'll tell you, then.'

'You'll confer a positive favour upon me by doing so, my dear Monsieur Duprat.'

'Why I shall not marry Marguerite Simon is, because you, Monsieur de Carleon, have sought to gain her love; because, by returning here, you have robbed me of my betrothed, my future wife, and my happiness.'

'My dear Monsieur Duprat,' replied Lord

Carleon, in the same tone of impertinent hauteur which he had affected from the beginning of the interview, 'you have committed a very grave error—one which I must beg you will allow me at once to correct.'

'An error?'

'You have made the mistake of applying to me the word *rob*—I have *robbed* you, you say. Pray understand, and bear in mind, my dear Monsieur Duprat, that though I sometimes *take*, I never *steal*.'

Paul Duprat had evidently well schooled himself before coming to meet Lord Carleon; evidently he had determined not to suffer himself to be irritated by anything his rival might say; thus the more surely to reach the end he had in view.

'Let it be so,' he replied, with a strange coolness of tone and bearing. 'If the expression I used displeases you, I withdraw it. But I repeat, that you have won from me the love of her I love, and who was to have become my wife.'

'Where the deuce can you have picked up such an idea?' cried Lord Carleon. 'You must have dreamt that Mademoiselle Simon had fallen in love with me!'

'It is no dream, Monsieur de Carleon.'

'A mere supposition, then, on your part.'

'A certainty.'

'Based upon what facts, may I ask?'

'What!' cried Paul Duprat, through his half-closed teeth, 'you deny it, then?'

'Most completely,' replied Lord Carleon.

'In spite of all evidence!'

'Evidence which, I venture to imagine, must be not a little characterised by obscurity.'

'You wish for proofs of what I advance?' cried Paul Duprat, with almost startling intensity of expression. 'So be it, Monsieur de Carleon: I will give you proofs!

'From the day on which I first set eyes on Mademoiselle Simon,' he said, 'I have loved her; loved her with my whole heart

and soul—loved her with a love that nothing can extinguish—that will go down with me to the grave. My father asked of Madame Simon the hand of her daughter for me, and my suit was accepted by both mother and daughter.

'I do not venture to say that Mademoiselle Marguerite then felt for me an affection equal to that which I had avowed for her. I do not believe she felt such an affection; but after a while she consented to become my wife, and love would have come with marriage—for I loved her too well not to have made her happy, and the gratitude of happiness disposes the heart to love.

'At that time Marguerite was as joyous and free from care as any girl of her age could be; and it was easy to see that if her heart was not wholly mine, at least it was no one else's.

'You came, monsieur. You spent a few days under her mother's roof, and all was changed. I met you at Madame Simon's,

and from that moment I no longer recognised my betrothed. You yourself could not have failed to remark her coldness towards me. She treated me no longer as her affianced husband, not even as a friend, but rather as a stranger whose presence was distressful to her.

'And when you took your leave, one might have said that you carried away with you the whole of her youthful spirits, she became so pale, so downcast. She seemed as if she might be dying.

'At length, when I again spoke of our marriage, the period of which was approaching, she told me plainly that she could not love me—that she had never loved me, and that she withdrew the pledge she had given me of becoming my wife.

'Now I ask you, Monsieur de Carleon, on what other ground than that of her love for you is it possible to explain her absolute change of mind and refusal to redeem her promise to me? From her birth Mar-

guerite Simon has known but two young men, yourself and me; she loves one of these two; it is not me—it therefore must be you.'

Paul Duprat paused, but Lord Carleon, who recognised the closeness and justness of his reasoning, made no reply. Taking this silence for a sort of acquiescence in what he had said, Paul continued:

'Monsieur de Carleon, my love for Marguerite is strong—strong enough to enable me to conquer even my hatred of you. I love her so perfectly that I would not hesitate to sacrifice my own happiness to insure hers. It is for this reason that I now address you in this frank and loyal manner.

'Marguerite loves you and you love her—will you marry her? will you render her happy? Say to that "yes," and to-morrow I shall have quitted this country, never to return to it, and you will hear no more of me.'

His voice slightly trembled as he uttered

these words, and he seemed almost inclined to extend his hand to Lord Carleon. For a moment the voice of conscience spoke movingly in the bosom of the latter, and had he obeyed its first dictates he would have taken to his heart the high-minded young man, who, with a modesty and resignation little short of sublime, offered to make for him the most heroic of all sacrifices.

But a mocking demon conjured up before him the sardonic image of the Chevalier laughing at his silly credulity; the course of his ideas changed, and the only reply he returned to Paul's touching appeal was a short insulting laugh.

Paul Duprat's face became livid.

'You take it so!' he cried in a half-suffocated voice. 'You will not marry her?'

'Really I don't feel called upon to marry all the young girls who may happen to decline the honour of marrying *you*, Monsieur Duprat!'

'Is that your last word, Monsieur de Carleon?'

'My very latest.'

'Then hear me, monsieur: from this moment I claim all the rights over Mademoiselle Simon given me by her mother in promising me her daughter's hand.'

'By all means, as far as I am concerned.'

'To me belongs the right and duty to watch over my betrothed, to guard from stain, not her honour, which is unassailable, but her maiden reputation.'

'And to what may all this tend, Monsieur Duprat?' demanded Lord Carleon, who instinctively felt that the prologue was finished, and that the drama was about to begin.

'To this!' answered Paul Duprat. 'I forbid you to pass another hour under the roof of Madame Simon.'

Lord Carleon started in angry astonishment.

'You *forbid* me!' he cried, taking a step towards his adversary, and making a threatening gesture. 'You *forbid* me!'

Paul Duprat remained perfectly calm, but he turned upon the other's face a look of terrible fixity as he replied:

'Yes, I forbid you!'

Fire flashed from Lord Carleon's eyes, as rage, in an instant, filled both heart and brain. He closed his fist, and dashed it at the young mountaineer's face; but before the intended blow had taken effect, the hand that should have given it was seized and held as in an iron vice.

CHAPTER X.

'WHERE ARE YOU GOING?'

Paul Duprat held the raised hand of his adversary for nearly a minute, until he had regained almost as perfect a calmness as he had exhibited up to the moment the attempted blow was given.

At first Lord Carleon thought his antagonist meditated drawing a knife upon him. He did nothing of the sort, however; but on releasing the imprisoned hand, said:

'The blow you intended, Monsieur de Carleon, is the death of one of us, and, frankly, I tell you I am glad it is so.'

'I am at your disposal,' said Lord Carleon.

'O, I expected you to say that, mon-

sieur,' replied Paul Duprat, with a smile upon his lips that sent a cold thrill through the heart of his antagonist.

Lord Carleon's assurance was, in fact, fast forsaking him; he felt both shame and remorse at the action which rage had driven him to commit—an action which he recognised as being one of odious and altogether unjustifiable brutality. But pride, which was at the bottom of his nature, joined to the prompting of the Chevalier's pernicious counsels, forbade him to draw back.

'You demand a duel, Monsieur Duprat,' he said; 'so be it. I accept beforehand all the conditions you think fit to impose.'

'Do you mean by that to confer a favour?' demanded Paul Duprat proudly.

'Not at all; I merely recognise in you the right of the offended party.'

'The conditions I name will be very simple, and will serve you as well as me.'

'Have you witnesses?'

'No, and I want none.'

'A duel without witnesses!' cried Lord Carleon.

'Can we not trust in each other's fairness?'

'No doubt we can,' replied Lord Carleon; 'but custom—'

'What does custom matter to us?' cried Paul quickly. 'Do you imagine that I would compromise Marguerite for ever by the scandal of a duel in a primitive country place like this?'

'What, then, is it you propose?'

'That the darkness of night shall surround our meeting; that whichever of us fate has designed to fall shall pass for the victim, not of a duel or a crime, but of an accident.'

'Will that be possible?'

'Not only possible, but easy.'

'May I trouble you to explain how?' said Lord Carleon.

'Doubtless you know,' replied Paul Duprat, 'that in obedience to a physical law—

a law so strange that I will not attempt to explain it — a man struck by a bullet, whether in the front of the head or in the chest, falls face forward?'

'Yes; I know that. What then?'

'When a duel takes place between two Corsicans, each of the adversaries places himself at the opposite end of a newly-dug pit, and whichever of them falls rolls into this grave dug by himself.'

'But we are not here in Corsica, Monsieur Duprat.'

'We can nevertheless, in our case, imitate the method of Corsican duellists.'

'You propose, then, that we should dig a pit?'

'Nature has spared us that trouble. On the opposite edges of the Fosse aux Loups, and separated by the gulf where it is widest, we shall be face to face, and the body of one of us—if not the bodies of both—will fall into the abyss; and when one or both of our bodies are found crushed at the bot-

tom, no one will think of searching for a bullet-wound to account for death.'

'Let it be as you propose,' said Lord Carleon.

This prompt decision evidently surprised Paul Duprat, who had doubted the adhesion of his antagonist to so unusual a mode of fighting. Lord Carleon could see by the expression in his face that Paul Duprat, deeply as he hated his rival, accorded to him his esteem.

'What weapon do you carry with you?' asked the mountaineer.

'A double-barrelled fowling-piece.'

'I will bring one like it,' replied Paul Duprat. 'Do you use close-fitting bullets?'

'Yes.'

'We will charge both barrels. If the first shot produces no effect, we fire again, until one of us falls dead.'

'When do you propose the meeting shall take place?'

'To-night.'

'At what hour?'

'The moon rises at twelve; will you be at the edge of the Fosse aux Loups at midnight?'

'I will be there,' replied Lord Carleon.

They parted, and Lord Carleon returned to the house of Madame Simon.

The rest of the day passed wearily. Marguerite did not appear at dinner, any more than she had appeared at breakfast; and Madame Simon and he alone partook of the meal.

It was easy to be seen that a heavy sadness weighed upon her; she scarcely addressed a single word to her guest. The eyes of Marie, who waited at table, were red and swollen, as if with many hours' weeping.

'Madame,' said Lord Carleon, at length breaking the melancholy silence which reigned over the entire party, 'I beg permission to take my leave of you this evening; for I cannot any longer abuse your

hospitality, and I shall start very early in the morning, doubtless before you have risen.'

These few words produced a magical effect.

The sadness of Madame Simon was dissipated as by enchantment, and at the same moment an expression of terror which had hitherto clouded the face of Marie was as suddenly cleared away from it. It seemed as if this announcement of Lord Carleon's intended departure had lifted from the minds of the two women an overwhelming burden.

Madame Simon became once more almost as cordial to him as she had been in his earlier visits, even speaking to him of Marguerite; a thing she had refrained from doing since the moment of his arrival.

Towards ten o'clock he retired to his chamber, Madame Simon bidding him farewell as if he had been a traveller setting forth upon a journey from which he was

never to return. She kissed him tenderly on the forehead, and wished him all happiness in his life.

Marie had long before disappeared.

On reaching his chamber he looked at his watch, and found that he had still two hours to wait before setting out on his way to the Fosse aux Loups.

After carefully loading his gun, he opened the window and looked up at the sky. The recollection of the night when he had stood in a similar manner awaiting the mysterious visit of Marie recurred to his mind.

How different were the circumstances! —how different the aspect of the sky on which his eyes now rested! Instead of being lit by a myriad of beaming stars, the heavens were as sombre as the roof of a tomb. Nature seemed, as it were, shrouding itself in a mantle of darkness.

In spite of himself he fell into reflection, and his reflections were as sombre as the

night, and as drear as death. And let him fight against the impression as he might, this conclusion stamped itself, as with a corroding and irresistible power, on his mind—that the sophisms of the Chevalier had betrayed and brought him to the fatal extremity he had now reached.

It was no longer possible for him to close his eyes against the light that now forced itself in upon his reason; he could not conceal from himself how completely he had been the dupe of his own preposterous suspicions, in believing that Madame Simon had sought to entangle him in the meshes of a matrimonial intrigue.

But there was no retreating from the position in which he was now placed, however false he felt it to be; the fatal words, 'It is too late,' fell murmuringly from his lips again and again. And he could only resolve to drain the bitter cup which he had madly filled for himself.

As to his intention of quitting the coun-

try on the following morning, should he be still living, it was perfectly sincere.

On consulting his watch anew, he found that the time for his departure had arrived. Shouldering his gun, he extinguished the candle in his room, and noiselessly made his way out of the dark and silent house.

The moon did not rise before midnight, and the darkness was so dense that he had some difficulty in finding his way; but after passing out of the garden-gate he moved rapidly in the direction of the place of rendezvous.

Before he had taken more than fifty paces, however, his attention was attracted by the sound of a light step behind him. He stopped to listen, and the sound ceased.

'I was mistaken,' he thought, and continued on his way.

But again the sound, now much nearer and more distinct, fell upon his ears; and for the second time he halted.

Almost as he did so, a hand was laid

upon his shoulder, and a trembling voice demanded,

'Where are you going?'

Marie was by his side.

'Where are you going?' she repeated.

'Do you not know?' he asked, after a moment's hesitation.

'How should I know?'

'At dinner this evening I announced to Madame Simon my intention of taking my departure; you were in the room and heard me, and the news, it seemed to me, gave you considerable pleasure.'

'You are really going?'

'Yes.'

'To return at once to the chateau de Carleon?'

'Yes.'

'It's false!' she cried, in a voice of suppressed agony,—'it's false!'

'What makes you say that?' he demanded, startled by words so entirely unexpected.

'I say that you are telling me falsehoods—because you are not going away, as you said you were; you are not now on your way to the chateau de Carleon, but to a meeting-place where you are going to fight with Monsieur Paul Duprat. Say that this is false, if you can!'

'Well,' he cried, after a moment's pause, during which he was utterly overcome with astonishment at the completeness of the young girl's knowledge of circumstances which he supposed to be only known to himself and Paul Duprat; 'I do not deny what you say; I *am* on my way to fight Monsieur Duprat; but how have you come to know all this, Marie?'

'I saw the boy bring you the letter this morning, and I felt sure that no one but Paul Duprat would have sent you a letter by such hands. You immediately left the house, and from that moment I dreaded danger to you; all the rest of the day I passed in weeping. At dinner, when you

spoke of your intention to return to your home, hope returned, and I thought that what I had dreaded might not come to pass. But I watched—for still I could not entirely overcome my doubts—and you see that I was right. Now tell me where Paul Duprat is waiting for you.'

'That I cannot tell you; it is his secret and mine!'

'You shall not go to meet him!'

'*Shall* not!'

'No, you shall not!' she cried vehemently.

'Who will prevent me?'

'I will!'

'You, Marie! By what right, in the name of wonder?'

'By the right of my love—my love for you, wild, hopeless as it is—my love, that hangs upon your life—though it may be but as the drowning wretch clings to the fragment of wreck that will but lengthen his torment and sink beneath him at last.'

It came too late. His heart was deaf to her appeal. He remembered only that Paul Duprat was awaiting him, and that his honour was at stake. What could the despairing love of a poor peasant-girl weigh in such a balance?

She saw that he was unmoved by her prayer, and in her agony of soul she threw her arms about him, to detain him in spite of himself.

'I must go, Marie,' he cried, 'I *must!* But calm yourself; I will return.' And as he spoke he tried to disengage himself from the living bonds that held him.

'You shall not go!' she cried, her excitement rising almost to a pitch of frenzy. 'You shall not go! you shall not go!'

Exerting all his strength, he at last succeeded in freeing himself from her grasp, and sprang away from her under cover of the thick darkness, taking the precaution to turn his steps in a direction opposite to that of the Fosse aux Loups, so as to mislead

her, if she persisted in attempting to follow him.

This ruse was successful. When, at the end of a few minutes, he stopped to take breath, he heard the sound of the poor girl's steps becoming fainter and fainter in the distance. Instead of pursuing, she was hurrying away from him.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO GUN-SHOTS.

After pausing for a few minutes, to make sure that Marie would not return upon her steps, he hurried onward to the place of meeting.

He reached the edge of the abyss dominated by the rugged peaks of the Dent du Chien at the moment when the moon, looking like a fiery-red shield, rose above one of the mountain-tops, and shed its pale and uncertain light over the landscape.

In this faint light Lord Carleon recognised the form of Paul Duprat, his figure boldly relieved against the sky. He was erect, his head slightly bent forward, and his two hands resting on the muzzle of his gun.

Instantly upon hearing the step of his adversary approaching, Paul Duprat raised his head, and advanced a step or two to meet him.

'You are punctual, monsieur,' he said with a sad smile.

'I have not kept you waiting, I hope?' replied Lord Carleon politely.

'No; I had but reached here a moment before you.'

'If you are ready, we will not lose any time. One would rather get through such business as ours as quickly as possible.'

'Decidedly,' replied Paul Duprat. 'Is your gun loaded?'

'Yes; and yours?'

'Is loaded also.'

'It remains, then, but to take our places and fire.'

'That is all. Is it perfectly understood between us, that if the first shots exchanged are ineffectual, we go on firing until one of us falls?'

Lord Carleon made a sign in the affirmative; but this implacably-persistent hatred and blood-thirstiness astonished and agitated him. His intention had been to receive the fire of his antagonist, and then, if not struck, to fire in the air; but the inflexible determination of his rival rendered the execution of this project impracticable. It was to be a duel to the death, and he must give or take a death-wound accordingly.

'Come,' said Paul Duprat.

Lord Carleon followed him, and took up a position, by his antagonist's direction, on the brink of the Fosse aux Loups, at a spot where the abyss was from thirty-five to forty feet across.

'I am now going to place myself on the opposite side,' said Paul Duprat. 'Let each of us recommend his soul to heaven. Then, monsieur, you will count aloud up to three; at the word "three," we fire together.'

'So let it be,' replied Lord Carleon.

With a firm and regular step Paul Du-

prat walked to the other side of the abyss, and took up the position he had indicated. Then he cocked his gun, and Lord Carleon did the same.

'Are you ready?'

'Yes,' replied Lord Carleon.

'Then count!'

Lord Carleon raised his gun and cried,

'ONE!'

Paul Duprat placed his gun to his shoulder, as did Lord Carleon, whose voice slightly faltered as he cried,

'Two!'

Slowly and deliberately Paul Duprat took his aim; Lord Carleon covered his antagonist more quickly and cried,

'THREE!'

It was the signal. A flash of fire darted into the night; the surrounding rocks repeated the tremendous detonation that instantly followed; and Lord Carleon heard the hiss of a bullet passing within a few hairs' breadth of his forehead.

In his turn he fired. A cry—a scream of mortal agony—rang in his ears and froze his heart's blood almost at the same instant that his finger pressed the deadly trigger of his gun; and then followed another sound as terrible—the dull crashing of a body falling through the bushes bordering the black gulf—down, down, till it was lost in the unseen depths.

When the smoke cleared away, Lord Carleon saw that he stood alone upon the brink of the Fosse aux Loups.

Almost at that moment, as if it had parted from the dying lips of his antagonist, a wild cry of anguish reached Lord Carleon's ears; and he recognised the voice of Marie.

The dark drama had not been played to its terrible conclusion without a witness.

Lord Carleon's hair rose on his head, and he rushed towards the spot from which the cry of the young girl had seemed to come. Doubtless, in searching for him, she

had reached the fatal meeting-place as Paul Duprat received his death-wound.

But it was in vain that he searched in all directions the neighbourhood of the Fosse aux Loups; in vain he called to Marie by name twenty times; he could not discover her, or even find a trace of her recent presence.

He trembled with terror lest a second catastrophe should have taken place; and this new trouble joined itself to the remorse which was already weighing with crushing force upon his soul—for he felt that he had shed the blood of a truly noble and generous man, and that for this a dreadful reckoning would be demanded of him.

This terror and agony of mind momently increased in intensity, until they had completely mastered him, and he fled wildly from the blood-imbrued spot, unconscious of whither his steps were directed.

On this wild and insensate course he stopped only when sheer exhaustion had

succeeded to the tempestuous and delirious workings of his mind. He leant against the trunk of a gigantic tree, and endeavoured to regain his lost self-possession.

The cool night-breeze played refreshingly upon his forehead, and slowly the irregular beatings of his heart were stilled. He looked around him, in the endeavour to discover where he was. A glance almost sufficed to enable him to recognise the spot on which he was standing: it was the corner of the Bois des Nonnes, and under the very tree against which he was now leaning for support, Paul Duprat—but a few short hours before—had almost gone so far as to offer him his hand!

It appeared to him that the earth was about to open at his feet and engulf him. In terrified haste he rushed from the unhallowed spot.

His first intention, as we know, had been to leave this part of the country immediately on the issue of the duel, and to re-

turn to the chateau de Carleon; and he now hurried forward in the direction of his home. But before he had proceeded very far, he suddenly stopped and retraced his steps.

He recollected that his two dogs were at Madame Simon's; and as he would not leave them behind him, he returned to the house.

In following him Marie had left the garden-gate open; and Fidèle, who sat in the opening like a vigilant sentinel, seemed to understand that this negligence imposed on him the necessity for watching more closely than usual. He instantly recognised Lord Carleon, and bounded with pleasure at the sight of him.

The noisy welcome of the faithful dog, however, threatened to betray Lord Carleon's return, and possibly to alarm Madame Simon. With some little difficulty he succeeded in quieting the too-demonstrative beast, and passed into the house for the purpose of opening the door of a sort of cupboard, in which garden-tools were

kept, and which served as a kennel for his two dogs.

He had taken but a few steps along the dark passage, when his feet struck against the body of some one extended on the floor. Quickly stooping, his hands encountered the dress of a woman. In an instant the idea flashed on his mind that Marie had returned, and fallen insensible before being able to reach her room.

Gently lifting the inanimate form, he carried it up to the room which he had occupied, and laid it upon his bed. He then endeavoured to find some water to sprinkle on her face; but his mind was anew thrown into confusion, and he could not remember in what part of the room the water was placed. His only resource was to draw a flint and steel from his game-bag, and relight the candle he had extinguished before going to the meeting-place at the Fosse aux Loups.

Overwhelming was his astonishment and

agitation when the light revealed to him, not the features of Marie, but those of Marguerite! All the events of this fatal night, even the terrible part he had played in the sanguinary drama so recently enacted, were in a moment forgotten. He saw nothing, he thought of nothing, in the entire universe but Marguerite.

He knelt by her side, and gazed long upon her pale face, plunged in passionate ecstasy and ardent adoration.

In falling, Marguerite had slightly wounded her forehead, the white and tender purity of which was stained by the trickling course of a few drops of blood. Lord Carleon covered this wound with kisses, stanching its bleeding with his lips.

Under the influence of these tender and yet wildly-impassioned caresses—the first that had ever touched her virgin forehead—Marguerite returned to consciousness.

Her large eyes opened, and gazed on Lord Carleon with an expression of dreamy aston-

ishment, and he feared that she would repulse him with affright; but she did not do so; and instead, a breathless cry of joy escaped from her lips. Then tears came to her relief, and she murmured in sobbing accents,

'You are living! Heaven be thanked!'

She entwined her arms about his neck with an *abandon* that proved her utter unconsciousness of the peril in which she was placing herself.

Alas, a thousand times better had it been for her had her innocence been less perfect! How many tears ofunavailing anguish might then have remained unshed by her! How many years of fruitless remorse might then have been spared Lord Carleon!

Alas that remorse and grief should follow alike upon the steps of guilt and innocence!

With whatever evil intentions Lord Carleon had returned from the chateau de Carleon to Madame Simon's house, the abominable sophistries of the Chevalier had

lost much of their influence over him in sight of the manifest uprightness and simplicity of Madame Simon's behaviour to him.

Guilty, deeply guilty, he was; but his guilt lay in permitting himself to be carried away by the vehemence of a passion, which both reason and conscience told him it was of all things his duty to keep under control. But clearness of vision returned to his mind only too late, and with it came the pangs of what was destined to be a life-long remorse. Shame and terror seized him—and cowardice so abject, that before the dawn of day he fled, leaving Marguerite to loneliness and despair.

His flight was an additional guilt—a crime.

When the sun rose above the mountains he was far away. Early in the day he reached his home, so overwhelmed by fatigue, so pale and altered in appearance, that his servants scarcely recognised him.

Home! The very word soon became intolerable. The isolated and monotonous existence, to which a residence at the chateau de Carleon condemned him, left him a defenceless prey to remorse, to drown which he needed noise, movement, change. But more than all he felt a need of the countenance of another mind, however sophistical, to support him against the unceasing accusation of his conscience.

He sought the Chevalier, and proposed that they should travel together for a few months, the entire expenses to be defrayed by himself. The Chevalier, whose purse was anything but deep, willingly acceded to the proposal, and they set-out together without any fixed plan.

During the better part of six months they moved about the highways of Europe, now pitching their tent in Italy, now in Germany — anywhere, in fact, whither chance—which they had taken for their guide—led them.

Where were they going? Lord Carleon knew not. What had they seen? Lord Carleon had seen nothing. His body was wandering purposelessly about the world; his mind was always amid the mountains of the Jura—with Marguerite.

At length he returned to the chateau de Carleon, bearing back with him his load of sadness and regret. Nothing had happened during his absence. One letter only awaited him; it had reached the chateau three months before; and he now opened it, without feeling the least desire to learn its contents.

But the words on which his eyes rested nearly turned his brain. The letter was from Marguerite. It was short and touching, at once suppliant and proud. It told him the full extent of the misfortune he had brought upon her, and with the noble simplicity of an innocent victim, asked him to give her his name and the protection of a husband.

A very tempest of remorse burst upon his heart as he finished reading the letter, and his reason would have given way under the wild and terrible strain so suddenly put upon it, but that an outburst of tears came to his relief.

As soon as he was capable of forming a resolution, he called for a horse; and before the tears on his cheeks were dry, he was galloping towards the mountains. In less than three hours he had ridden nearly twelve leagues, and had reached a point whence, through the openings of the forest, he could discern the house of Madame Simon, when his horse fell from exhaustion.

He continued his breathless course on foot. He scarcely seemed to tread the earth under him—he seemed rather to fly.

At last he reached the garden-gate. It was closed. All the shutters of the house were drawn; the house itself was silent!

He rang the bell. No echo was awak-

ened by its dull and stifled sound. Nobody answered its summons. Fidèle was not there with his noisy welcome as of old. The house was deserted.

What had happened?

A few hundred paces off, a peasant was driving a slow team of oxen, while he guided his ploughshare through the stony ground. Lord Carleon went up to him, and questioned him with hesitation and terror. The man's answers were in the last degree disheartening.

The house was empty. Six months ago Marie had disappeared, about the same time that Monsieur Paul Duprat had left the country. People at first thought that they had gone away together; but, a little while later, somebody had found at the edge of a mountain-torrent a gold cross attached to a velvet ribbon; and the report was spread that Marie had committed suicide, which led to a search being made for her body—and at length it was found.

Nobody knew what had become of Paul Duprat.

As for Madame Simon and Mamselle Marguerite, two months ago they had left that part of the country, without saying where they were going, only telling those who asked them about it, that they were never coming back again.

Lord Carleon hurried away, to hide the agony with which this account filled his soul.

In all directions he sought for Marguerite. For years his life was devoted to the task of seeking her; and the fruitlessness of his task was, in some sort, an expiation of his crime.

CHAPTER XII.

LIFE AND DEATH.

On the heart of Madame Simon the misfortune of her daughter fell with a crushing effect; all other misfortunes she could have courageously borne but this. No thought of blaming Marguerite ever crossed her mind; and her tenderness was redoubled in answer to the demand made upon her by the sight of her child's unmerited affliction.

Heart-broken, but still retaining energy enough to face the difficulties of the position, she had left her house and gone to live in the most secluded dwelling she could find in the city of Geneva, where she was entirely unknown, and where she adopted another name, still farther to guard against recognition or discovery.

Here her strength had given way, and she took to her bed, from which she was never to rise again. Her latest breath was spent in blessing Marguerite, and commending her to the care of heaven.

Deprived of her mother's support and guidance the poor girl gave herself up to unrestrained despair, for which there appeared to her but one relief—the last terrible resource of suffering too great to be endured—suicide. After kissing a thousand times the tranquil face that could no more look back her despairing love, she rushed from the house towards the lake, sobbing wildly as she went.

It was night-time and dark, and the path she was following on her dreadful mission seemed to be wholly deserted; at least she noticed no one on her way. Her passing, however, had been observed by a gentleman who was seated on one of the public benches near the shore.

He was smoking a cigar, and contem-

plating the dark aspect of the broad-stretching lake, when the sound of light hurried steps coming in his direction had first attracted his attention. The wild sobbing of the girl had at once made him take an interest in her proceedings, and helped him to divine the motive with which she was speeding towards the water.

Softly and quickly he followed her—in time to prevent the accomplishment of her dreadful purpose.

Marguerite was powerless in his strong but tender grasp; and little by little he succeeded in subduing the frantic outpouring of her despair. His voice and manner both had a soothing influence upon her mind, without her being conscious of the effect they were producing. Gradually, and without being aware of what she was doing, she suffered him to draw from her an explanation of all the later causes of her grief, and a promise that under no circumstances would she renew the attempt upon her life.

Then he led her back to the house she had come from, beseeching her to seek consolation and strength in prayer, and, before parting with her, obtained of her permission to call and see her on the following morning.

This gentleman was an Englishman; by name and title Sir Hubert Dalbright, Baronet. At the moment he was seeking in travel diversion from the depressing monotony, not so much of country life as of country society.

He was five-and-thirty years of age, the owner of a handsome house and estate in Somersetshire of the value of five thousand a year. He was greatly esteemed by all who knew him; and not the less a standing source of surprise, from the fact that he had never manifested any inclination to share the advantages of his position with a wife.

Many overtures on this subject had been made to him by old friends of his family, who dreaded to see a name so long honoured

in the country become extinct. The richest and most beautiful heiresses in his neighbourhood had been offered to him. He had but to make his choice, and it was almost certain that his solicitation would be favourably received.

To the advice or insistance of his friends, however, he had always answered smilingly, that he was not at all an enemy to marriage, but found bachelor-life perfectly pleasant to him; and that he should never marry but at the dictation of his heart. And up to the time of his departure on a tour through Switzerland, Italy, Germany, and the north of Europe, his heart had never spoken.

But, as the old proverb says, 'Nothing ever happens as wished, as feared, or as foreseen.' A great surprise was reserved for the acquaintances of Sir Hubert Dalbright.

During the three first months after his departure, he had written from time to time to some of his relatives; these letters sud-

denly ceased—so suddenly, indeed, that it was apprehended some accident must have befallen the writer.

At the end of about a year, however, Sir Hubert, without previous announcement of any sort, returned home. He was not alone, but accompanied by a young wife, to whom he had been married abroad.

Great was the curiosity excited. Everybody sought to know the Baronet's young wife; and at first a feeling of disfavour was manifested towards her. It was generally supposed that Sir Hubert had formed a *mésalliance;* and this supposition appeared the more likely when it was considered that a marriage between equals in social position and fortune is usually performed with something of public pomp and circumstance.

Feelings of hostility were of short duration, however; they rapidly gave way before the touching beauty and charm of the young wife's character. She was but just eighteen; and in her extreme youth, and

in the angelic sweetness and purity of her visage, there was something irresistibly attractive.

She was fair and pale, with large blue eyes of sad expression, like a melancholy daughter of vaporous Germany. She rarely smiled, but her smile was one of infinite softness. In manners as in person she was above and beyond criticism. She had the simple, innate *distinction* of a young queen; a special grace was discovered in her every movement.

A month after her arrival, Marguerite, Lady Dalbright, was the admiration of her husband's circle of friends.

Yes; Marguerite Simon had become the wife of Sir Hubert Dalbright, who had snatched her from death; and who, after hearing from her lips the entire story of her life, had come to look on her as an angel of truth and purity walking the earth, and claimed her as a gift from heaven.

Her bearing towards him was sometimes

strange. She appeared to love him with a profound and inexpressible tenderness; yet there were moments when she shrank from him, as if he inspired her with affright. The look she turned on him almost always expressed respect and gratitude; when she addressed him, her voice was almost tremulous, and she spoke with a sort of humble and timid submission which nothing in his bearing appeared to justify; for his manner towards her was that of a man who idolised her, and to whom the slightest wish expressed by her would be a delightful command.

At the time of her arrival Marguerite was within a few weeks of becoming a mother; but the looked-for event did not appear to bring with it the joy which usually belongs to the birth of an heir. As the moment drew near, Marguerite's sadness increased, and she passed long hours kneeling in prayer, and weeping tears of bitterness.

Sir Hubert also appeared careworn, and

though he tried to conceal the trouble by which he was oppressed, he could not banish from his brow the deep and permanent wrinkle which had settled there; nor could he hide the darkened rings that surrounded his eyes, and told of nights of sleeplessness and mental suffering.

At length the news was brought to him that he was a father—that a son was born to him; and he was summoned to the side of his wife.

Marguerite was pale, and her eyes were closed as he entered the chamber; but she instantly recognised the sound of his footsteps, and a feeble cry escaped from her lips. He took her nerveless hands in his, and kissed her with ineffable tenderness.

Then the new-born infant was brought to him, but, as if compelled by an irresistible impulse, he fell back a step, and turned deadly pale.

Marguerite saw and heard all that was passing. In spite of her weakness she raised

herself upon her elbow, her head thrown forward, and her look filled with alarm, as if something terrible was taking place. Sir Hubert's eyes rested upon her face, and in a moment the expression of his own visage was calmed, a smile beamed on his lips, and he bent over the infant and kissed its forehead, murmuring as he did so,

'Poor child, it resembles its mother.'

He then gently returned to Marguerite's side, and she wound her arms about his bowed head, and pressed it to her heart in a sort of delirium.

'Heaven for ever bless you for all your goodness!' she cried, and overcome by this passionate effort, she sank back upon her pillow.

By the doctor's advice, Sir Hubert left his wife to the repose so needful to her, and shut himself in his library, where, two hours later, a message was brought to him that Lady Dalbright desired to speak with him. Without a moment's loss of time he obeyed

the summons, a vague sense of terror stealing over him as he approached his wife's chamber.

'Do not be alarmed,' she said, on observing the inquiring anxiety expressed in his face.

'What is it you wish to say to me, my dear wife?' he asked, as he seated himself by her bedside.

For a moment she was silent, as if she hesitated to reply. Then she said,

'My dear husband, you are noble-minded, delicate, generous, chivalrous; you have been so infinitely compassionate to me that, if I might, I would never more address you but on my knees; the very greatness of your goodness makes me fear to abuse it.'

'I do not understand you, my darling,' he replied.

'I wish to know your orders,' she said.

'My orders!—on what subject?'

'With regard to—to my poor child.'

'Orders, my Marguerite! what do you mean?'

'I desire to know what is to become of it; where you wish me to send it?' she cried, in a voice almost stifled with sobs.

'My dearest wife,' replied Sir Hubert, with a tender solemnity of tone and manner, and taking her hand in his, 'the son's place is in his father's house. Our child will live here, under our own roof.'

Marguerite uttered a long cry of joy—a cry that seemed to express an almost superhuman concentration of feeling. Her hand closed with a gentle and sustained pressure on that of her husband, and her eyes closed as in sleep.

Sir Hubert's eyes were blinded with tears, or he would have seen that the angelic tranquillity which had fallen upon the features of his wife was not of this world.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COWL TO THE MONK.

The blow of his wife's death fell with terrible and devastating force upon the heart of the bereaved Baronet. For some time life hung by him almost at the mercy of chance; but at length the goodness of his nature and the strength of his constitution saved him from the threatened grasp of death.

He rose from his bed of sickness an altered man, sombre and taciturn. He avoided all society, even that of his nearest friends, and his mansion—once so full of life and cheerfulness—became dull and silent as a deserted cloister.

From the day of Marguerite's death, her

child, which had been baptised and received the name of Gerald Dalbright, had been placed at nurse in one of the villages near Dalbright Hall; and the Baronet appeared to avoid as far as possible speaking of him, or hearing him spoken of.

Nobody was surprised at this evidence of what was taken for a natural repulsion. Sir Hubert adored his wife, and could not bear to look upon even the innocent cause of her death. This was the view taken by everybody.

For her young charge, on the other hand, the nurse to whose care he had been confided conceived as truly maternal a fondness as if he had been one of her own children. He was anything but strong at his birth; and it is not impossible that, to the simple open-air existence he led in his earliest years, he owed the health and strength which he later enjoyed,—if, indeed, it had not been better that he had gone to the grave an infant.

Sir Hubert Dalbright's character, as has been indicated, was that of a religious-minded man; yet for a while the poignancy of his grief had made him doubt of heaven's justice in depriving him of all he esteemed of most worth in the world; but as the bitterness of his sorrow was assuaged by time, his mind bowed with humility, and he returned to the recollection of the sacred duties he had taken upon himself.

He had not seen Marguerite's child for six years, and his conscience told him that in this he had done wrong. He did not hesitate for a moment to repair his fault.

The child had grown into the image of his mother, and the sight of him revived, with terrible intensity, the half-silenced anguish of her grief-stricken husband. But the likeness between the mother and child was that of the face only, as Sir Hubert too soon discovered.

He was six years old. His natural intelligence was far superior to that of his

rustic companions. Of instruction he had received none whatever.

Neither sun nor wind had injured the fresh fairness of his complexion; and, with his thick blonde hair falling in curls upon his shoulders, he was as beautiful as one of Raphael's cherubs. To see him in the midst of the nurse's four children, dressed like them, gnawing heartily a big hunk of bread and cheese, little Gerald looked like an angel dropped by some chance among those peasant children.

From having heard it said, he knew that he was the son of a rich Baronet, who would some day come to take him home; but the words baronet, riches, and hall, carried with them but a vague significance to the childish mind.

His father, the Baronet, he did not know; he knew, on the other hand, the husband of his nurse, and called him 'papa.' He loved this rough and worthy fellow, loved his nurse, loved his little companions,

their children; he was perfectly happy, indeed, with all his surroundings; and had he been old enough to have known what his future life was to be, he would hardly have desired greater happiness than to pass his entire days in the farm of his affectionate nurse. There, perhaps, he might have found true happiness; but destiny had determined otherwise in his regard.

Convinced that he had too long delayed the fulfilment of his duty to Marguerite's son, Sir Hubert determined to go and see the child—the child born, as it were, of tears. Mounting his horse, therefore, he rode over to the little village where Gerald was living; his thoughts during his ride turning back sorrowfully to the past, and his eyes dimmed with tears, as he pictured the joy that would have surrounded every step of his life had Marguerite lived to shed the radiance of her love upon his life.

He had dropped the reins upon his horse's neck, and with down-bent head was

absorbed in these reflections, when suddenly the horse stopped abruptly. Mechanically he raised his eyes, and then it seemed that a vision was before him—Marguerite, her great soft blue eyes looking into his!

'Marguerite! are you come to seek me?' he murmured with pious enthusiasm; 'are you come to take me away with you?'

But he had scarcely uttered this passionate invocation before he perceived that it was no illusion, no visitant from another world, on which he was gazing, but reality.

A group of five children were in the middle of the road, and one of these was the faithful image, the living portrait of Marguerite—his lost and deplored Marguerite.

In a moment he understood all, and, springing from his horse, took the beautiful child's head between his hands, inquiring:

'Is not your name Gerald?'

'Yes,' replied the child; and added proudly, 'Gerald Dalbright.'

These words, simple as they were, produced upon Sir Hubert an astonishing effect—wrought in his heart and feelings a change, complete, absolute, incomprehensible. All the bitterness passed away from his remembrance as by enchantment. He saw in Gerald nothing but the image of Marguerite. He said to himself that only two like souls could inhabit two bodies so much alike; and all the fervid love he had felt for the mother turned in holy affection to the child. He took Gerald in his arms and pressed him to his bosom; and he covered his fair face with kisses and tears —tears not wholly of pain.

Gerald was not at all frightened by these impassioned caresses, but only greatly surprised.

'Who are you, sir?' he said; 'I never saw you before.'

'I am your father, my child,' replied the Baronet through his tears.

'O, then you are the gentleman the big

Hall belongs to—Dalbright Hall?' demanded the child.

'Yes, my dear.'

'O, then, as you are my papa, I shall love you when I get to know you; but I don't know you yet, and so I love Westfield now, you see.'

Sir Hubert was about to reply, but the child gave him no time.

'Is that handsome horse yours?' he asked, pointing to the animal, which was vainly trying to crop a few mouthfuls of grass from the roadside.

'Yes, my child.'

'O! Well, then, as you are my papa, I want to ride on horseback; put me on your horse.'

The Baronet smilingly obeyed. Gerald drove his heels into the horse's flanks while Sir Hubert led it by the bridle, and shouted:

'Hi! Gee-up! Gallop, gallop!'

'If you like,' said the Baronet, 'you

shall have a little horse to ride on entirely by yourself.'

'Yes; I shall like that. Let me have it at once.'

'To-morrow—'

'To-morrow! O, that's such a long time to wait. I want to ride to the farm to-day, so that papa Westfield and mamma may see me.'

Sir Hubert led the horse, which advanced at a grave pace with its little rider, and followed by the four sons of his nurse; who, seeing the party enter the farmyard, and recognising the Baronet, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

'Gracious goodness!' she cried, 'can it be possible?'

'Look — look, mamma!' cried Gerald; 'see how well I sit on a big horse.'

'Yes, my pet; you look as strong and bold as a boy of fifteen.'

Sir Hubert lifted him out of the saddle, and set him on the ground. He instantly

ran to his nurse, and whispered in her ear:

'Mamma, this gentleman says he's my papa; *is* he?'

'Certainly he is,' she replied; 'Sir Hubert Dalbright, about whom we have so often spoken to you, and taught you to remember in your prayers morning and night.'

'Dear child!' cried Sir Hubert, again kissing him; 'does he pray for me?'

'And for mamma, too—mamma who is in heaven, I mean,' replied the child.

Tears again filled Sir Hubert's eyes.

'You are an excellent woman, Mrs. Westfield,' he said to the nurse with strong emotion.

'None too good, I fear, Sir Hubert,' she replied; 'but I may say for certain that I have always felt as fond of your son as if he had been one of my own children. Haven't I always loved you, Gerald?'

'O yes, mamma; you've always given

me nice large slices of bread; but this gentleman is my papa, and he's going to give me a pony all for myself.'

The conversation, as far as it had gone, passed in the farmyard; at that moment a robust-looking man appeared on the threshold of the house.

'Here, William, come here!' cried Mrs. Westfield.

'What's the matter?' inquired the farmer, slowly approaching the group.

'Here's Sir Hubert — Sir Hubert Dalbright.'

On hearing the Baronet's name in full, the farmer stopped short and uttered a long low whistle, at the same time turning to his wife with a puzzled expression of countenance.

'My coming appears to have greatly surprised you, Mr. Westfield,' remarked Sir Hubert.

'Well, Sir Hubert, to tell the truth, we had a'most given up the idea of your ever

coming to see the little one,' replied the farmer; 'six years is a goodish long time—'

'But don't think that we blame you,' cried Mrs. Westfield.

'No, no—of course not,' chimed in her husband.

'But I blame myself,' said Sir Hubert.

'The little one, however, has been quite happy with us, and, so long as you like to leave him with us, we shall be glad to have him.'

'You are good people,' replied Sir Hubert, 'and I will reward your kindness as it deserves.'

'We want no reward, Sir Hubert; it is not for gain that we wish to keep the little one with us. Are you thinking of taking him away?'

'Yes, friends.'

'Soon?'

'To-day.'

Mrs. Westfield burst into tears.

'I have so long culpably deprived my-

self of the society of my son, that you can well understand I am impatient to have him by me.'

'It's only natural it should be so,' replied Mrs. Westfield; 'but at the thought of this dear child going away, I feel as much as if one of my own little ones were about to be taken from me.'

She turned towards her four children, who were standing by with open mouths and staring eyes, understanding little or nothing at all of what was passing.

'Children, your brother Gerald is going away, and you will never see him again,' she said.

The effect of these words was as instantaneous as that of an electrical shock. Eight elbows was suddenly raised, eight doubled fists were thrust into four pairs of eyes, and a quartett of dismal howls broke forth simultaneously.

For a moment Gerald, whose attention was diverted from his father's horse, joined

his cries and tears to those of his foster-brothers, and he exclaimed:

'I won't go!—I won't be taken away!'

'You see — you see,' cried the good woman with legitimate pride, 'how fond he is of us.'

It was evident to Sir Hubert, under the circumstances, that the best course he could take was to temporise; seeing that it would be cruelty to take a child from the midst of those whom he was accustomed to consider as his family, and to carry him in spite of his resistance to a place unknown to him, where all the faces that would surround him would be equally strange. He therefore told Gerald that he should remain at the farm as long as he liked. The child's tears was instantly dried, and his delight expressed itself in shouts of joy.

Sir Hubert spent the remainder of the day with Gerald, and on parting with him to return home, announced his intention of coming back to see him on the day but one

following. Already familiar with him, and accustomed to his caresses, Gerald felt a sort of regret on seeing him go away.

Two days later Sir Hubert returned according to his promise. He was accompanied by a servant leading a beautiful Shetland pony, with long tail and mane, equipped with a handsome saddle and bridle.

At sight of the pony Gerald went into an ecstasy of delight. He insisted upon being instantly helped into the saddle, and at the end of an hour rode all about the farm without needing to be held on. The farmer's sons were permitted to bestride the pony in turns, but one after another they lost their equilibrium and tumbled on to the grass amid shouts of laughter; and the amusement was continued until the children were all fairly tired out.

The next day Sir Hubert returned, to give Gerald a fresh lesson in riding, and the child grew rapidly to be fond of him, and constantly called him 'Papa.' These visits

to the farm were continued for a week. At the end of that time Sir Hubert invited Mr. and Mrs. Westfield with the children to come for a day to Dalbright Hall.

This invitation was accepted with pleasure. Gerald had never been away from the farm; for him, consequently, the word Hall signified nothing very precise. At first he was speechless and stupefied by the wonders of his father's dwelling-place. But at sight of the luxury, elegance, and richness that met his gaze on all sides, instincts until then unknown suddenly awoke within his soul.

He immediately realised the fact of his being in his own home, that all belonged to him, that he had only to desire to have. He at once divined the superiority of his position, as the son of a rich gentleman, over that of the little peasants, whom till then he had considered as his brothers. Hardly had he felt his superiority ere he abused it, by making it felt by his companions. Hi-

therto he had been their comrade and equal; he assumed to be their master and oppressor.

The farmer's eldest boy, in whose mind the idea of social distinction was yet wholly undeveloped, declined to put up with Master Gerald's high airs; they appealed to the right of the stronger, and Gerald was beaten. He immediately ran crying and complaining to his father. Sir Hubert was too just to do wrong to the farmer's children, who, after all, had only acted in self-defence; but he turned the occasion to the advantage of his wishes, by demonstrating to Gerald that his foster-brothers were too rough by nature for him to sympathise with them entirely. He made him comprehend that his proper place was at the Hall, where he would find himself much happier than at the farm, for he would there be alone and the master. This reasoning, supported by the pain of the blows he had received, appeared to be quite convincing.

He was, at first, somewhat alarmed at

the idea of being alone; but upon Sir Hubert showing him a handsome little gun, and promising to teach him how to shoot birds with it every day in the park, he ceased to make any sort of objection to remaining at the Hall.

His decision caused great sorrow to the Westfields, both husband and wife, and above all to their children, who bore no animosity for the blows they had received. Many tears were shed. The rest of the day passed sadly. Gerald himself was not happy; though, from a sort of false shame, almost incomprehensible in a child of his age, he pretended to be so.

The farmer and his wife took their departure from the Hall under the sad conviction that Gerald was an unfeeling child, and that he had never really cared for them. Sir Hubert could not help being of the same opinion, and was painfully affected. He invited the Westfields to repeat their visit, but they firmly declined.

Gerald had scarcely been home more than a week before his nature began to exhibit itself by marked signs. He was wilful and blusterous, exacting and imperious. He expected every one to give way to him, to indulge him in every caprice. He feared no one, not even the Baronet himself; and it was as much as Sir Hubert could do, short of applying actual coercion, to insure obedience to his commands.

At the same time it was evident that the boy possessed an active and imaginative mind. He understood easily, and anything he once comprehended was for ever after engraven upon his memory. In all exercises of bodily strength and address he promised to excel; for under an apparent delicacy of structure was hidden great muscular vigour.

To sum up all, there was plainly combined in him both good and evil. It would be the work of education to destroy his bad qualities and develop his good ones. This

difficult task Sir Hubert undertook, and constituted himself his son's preceptor.

He endeavoured to open the boy's heart to the divine precepts of virtue, and his intelligence to the great lessons of science. At the same time, as relaxations from more serious studies, he put into his hand a riding-whip or a fencing-foil; he made him an excellent horseman and a tolerably good shot. Finally, and as a crowning recompense for his industry, he would take him to join in the county hunt, in which pursuit the young horseman soon gave proofs of singular address.

In the midst of these pursuits and pleasures, Marguerite's son grew apace. He had reached his twelfth year, and body and mind had been developed as completely as the Baronet could have hoped to find them. He had reached a period when, Sir Hubert thought, he required a more competent teacher to carry on his education. With this idea, a clergyman of approved reputa-

tion was engaged, and installed in the house under the title of Gerald's governor.

Under the able direction of this master a new transformation appeared to take place in the character and habits of the pupil.

Work, which up to that time had never been anything but a duty with him, seemed to become a positive pleasure. It appeared more than probable that Gerald would grow up to be in every respect a remarkable man; that he would worthily bear the name of Dalbright, and make a noble use of the fortune he would one day inherit.

But, to overthrow all these hopes, little was wanted. A few books furtively read; nothing more.

Gerald was fifteen. He and his governor had made the library of Dalbright Hall their place of study, and this library was furnished with books, classical and modern, of a character fatally dangerous to a mind and temperament like those of Marguerite's son. In

an evil hour he had made discovery of their presence.

He kept the fact as much a secret from his governor as from Sir Hubert.

And soon a great and lamentable change had been effected in him, though it was unrecognised. His heart, if not his soul, was poisoned.

By the time he was eighteen, his name was associated with more than one rustic scandal, to the shame and grief of Sir Hubert, who took the only course which seemed to promise him security against the occurrence of some possibly greater distress of a like kind.

Gerald was only too happy to get away from the surveillance of his father, and in company with a confidential servant, and furnished with money and letters-of-credit on half-a-dozen bankers, he set out joyously to make the tour of Europe.

Three years passed. Gerald wrote home regularly, and his letters were the only

pleasure and distraction that visited Sir Hubert in the solitude of his house, into which he had once more retreated, in company with the ever-living remembrance of his lost Marguerite.

One day a letter, addressed from Milan, arrived from Gerald, announcing his intention of passing the winter in Florence, where he was to arrive on the following month. The letter contained a request that orders on a banker of the last-named city might be sent to him in anticipation of his arrival.

Instead of receiving an answer from Sir Hubert, he found a letter addressed to him by his father's steward, informing him that the Baronet had fallen dangerously ill, that the doctors in attendance found the case all but hopeless, and finally urged him to return home without a moment's delay.

Fiery and unrestrained passions had dried and corrupted the young man's heart; but he was not wholly without love for a father so excellent as the Baronet had

proved himself to be. An hour after the receipt of the steward's letter, Gerald was on his way home, as fast as railways and steamers could carry him.

But vainly he attached the wings of his impatience to the vehicles that were bearing him along; he reached home too late. The son of Marguerite was not permitted to close the eyes of Sir Hubert Dalbright. The adoring and noble-hearted husband had rejoined his lost wife; his mortal remains were already laid in the grave.

For the moment Gerald was somewhat cast down by this hardly-foreseen catastrophe. He went to the churchyard. Tears flowed from his eyes—tears of sincere sorrow—as he stood beside the newly-closed tomb, and thought of all the dead man's goodness lost to him henceforth.

But these impressions were as short-lived as they were acute. Distractions quickly came to efface them from his fatally-unstable mind.

He speedily became engrossed in the details of the handsome fortune of which he was now the master. He found himself possessed of a clear five thousand a year; and with a disposition such as his, his worst enemy could hardly have invented for him a greater misfortune than to endow his youth and inexperience with such terrible facilities for evil-doing.

As may easily be imagined, however, he took an entirely different view of his position. Visions of a life of unrestricted pleasure opened out before him. By the exercise of a strong effort of the will, he restrained his impatience for a certain time —that is to say, for about half the customary period of mourning—before setting out on the way of life he had determined to pursue.

CHAPTER XIV.

ENTERING ON THE DOWNWARD PATH.

It was his ill-fortune, at one of the German watering-places, to have fallen into the society of the man of all men most capable of exercising a strong and injurious influence upon his already evilly-disposed mind. This man was the Chevalier de Villiers, whose mission it appeared to be to spend the latter days of his flagitious life in corrupting, or in helping to corrupt, the souls of young men of Gerald's age and class.

He was the same wicked old man whom we have seen only too successfully exercising his devilish craft upon Lord Carleon; but he was three-and-twenty years older and more wicked when, on his way to London, Gerald paid him a flying visit at

Bath, where the old *roué* was vegetating, as he called it, on the small means remaining to him out of the fortune he had squandered in his earlier years of reckless libertinage.

'Thousand times glad to see you, my dear boy!' he cried, the moment Gerald was ushered into his presence. 'I wondered whether, amid the hailstorm of good-fortune that has been descending of late upon your thrice-favoured head, you might not forget your old friends—one of your *very* old friends especially.'

'You see how ill you have judged me, Chevalier,' replied Gerald.

'We'll admit the fact with pleasure on both sides, and then pass on to the pleasant results of it. You are come to Bath, however, for something more than to see how much older I've grown in the course of the last two years, eh, *mon enfant?* Take my word for it, we *do* grow old at a devil of a rate after reaching a certain point in life.

Live as much and as long as you can, therefore, before reaching the abominable point in question, is the best advice an old fellow at the execrable end of life can give to a young fellow at the joyous beginning of it.'

Gerald told him that he was then on his way to London, for the express purpose of commencing the sort of life of which the Chevalier was a master-spirit.

'O,' cried the old man, 'compliments! Keep 'em, my son—keep 'em for pretty women—the least pretty especially; they're wasted on me. And when you get to London, what are you going to do?'

'Cannot you come to London? then I should be in no doubt,' replied Gerald.

The Chevalier shook his head.

'Impossible,' he said; 'too much white on my head, too little yellow in my purse. London's twenty years too young for *me;* but for you, it's the place of places—not forgetting dear, damned, delightful Paris

when I say so. But, once more—when you get to London, what are you going to do there?'

'Anything, everything—live!'

'Bravo! *live's* the word! Do you know many people in London?'

'Only a few families, who from time to time paid my late father a visit.'

'Grave people?'

'Very.'

'Tiresome to the very limits of endurance?'

'I'm afraid so.'

'You need not be in any doubt, my dear boy; they *are*. The world is full of such people, and the days of plagues are gone by, so that they increase and multiply, confound 'em, at their ease; and you can't too early learn to avoid 'em as carefully as if they were "good" books or badly-cooked dinners. As you won't associate with these people, with whom *will* you make acquaintance?'

'I really have not thought on the subject.'

'That means, you'll trust to making chance acquaintances?'

'Most likely.'

The Chevalier laughed a silent laugh, and his eyes twinkled, as if all the wicked knowledge of his life were set fermenting in his mind, and thus outwardly expressed itself.

'My dear boy,' he cried, 'in great cities, when a young man of your stamp permits himself to make chance acquaintances, the odds are twenty to one that he falls into the clutches of knaves who will rob him, or of adventurers who will soil him by their contact, and compromise his name and person.'

'You alarm me, Chevalier!' cried Gerald.

'I'm very glad you came to me, *mon cher*, before setting foot in that city of mixed delight and rascality.' Then, after a slight pause, he added: 'I think I may be

able to pass you forward into good and safe keeping. I'll give you a letter of recommendation to an old friend of mine, who will set you in the right path.'

'Is he a contemporary of yours, Chevalier?' asked Gerald, with a slightly doubtful accent.

'O no,' replied the old man smiling; 'Lord Carleon is young enough to be my—not being a woman, I confess it freely—my grandson. If my memory serves me, he is but five-and-forty at the most.'

'Lord Carleon!' Gerald repeated to himself; but the name was entirely strange to him. He had never before heard of it. 'Lord Carleon is a thorough man of fashion, I may presume?' he asked.

'He moves in the very best circles, both in London and Paris,' replied the Chevalier; 'and if, for old acquaintance' sake, he will undertake what I shall ask of him on your behalf, there is no one who can do so much towards putting you in the way you want

to go. Carleon is one of the kings of society.'

'He must be very rich,' observed Gerald.

'I doubt if his income exceeds two thousand a year,' replied the Chevalier; 'but,' he added, 'he possesses something that is of more value in society than money —he knows how to live.'

'I cannot sufficiently express my obligations to you for introducing me to such a man.'

'Call upon me in a couple of hours from this time, and the letter shall be ready for you, my dear boy. At the same time we will drink together a stirrup-cup of a certain vintage of claret not to be profanely talked of, since its like may never revisit this side of the earth, which the sun of late has seemed to me to neglect abominably.'

At the time appointed Gerald returned; and after spending a few hours carousing with his dangerous friend, received the promised letter of introduction, and took

his leave, engaging himself to write frequently to the Chevalier, and give him a full account of his proceedings in London.

The letter with which the Chevalier had furnished his protégé was addressed—

'Lord Carleon, Bolton-street, Piccadilly, W.'

Its contents were as follows:

'My dear Lord Carleon,—If you have preserved any sympathy for an old—detestably old—friend, you will, with that obliging kindness which used to be habitual with you, permit me to introduce to you the bearer of this letter, Sir Gerald Dalbright, a young gentleman for whom I am happy to profess the most sincere and lively affection.

'Allow me, my dear Lord Carleon, to beg for him the doubly great advantage of your friendly countenance and of the precious counsels of your experience.

'I wish it were permitted me to have

the happiness of placing his hand in yours; it would give me the greatest possible satisfaction to see two such hands resting cordially in each other. Unfortunately, I am chained-up in this provincial kennel, where I expect to end my days as dully as any other toothless old hound. But since I cannot in person present to you my young friend—and, shall I say it, pupil?—allow me to introduce him from a distance just as I would, if I could be present. This will spare us both—me the trouble of writing, and you the trouble of reading—a long statement of who my young friend is and what I venture to ask of you on his account.

'In the first place, look at him, I beg. To my eyes he appears as handsome and alluring as the mischievous god whom the charming ancients so happily named Cupid; and I am ready to be sworn on my Anacreon that, old as I am, I am not yet so blind as Justice. He is nearly two-and-twenty. His

father, Sir Hubert Dalbright, of Dalbright Hall, Somersetshire, died six months ago and left him five thousand a year. As to externals, you have now, I imagine, as much as you will care to be told of Sir Gerald Dalbright.

'As to his mind, disposition, tastes—he is anything but a fool, as young men go. For the rest, I have done my best to fit him to enjoy the advantages which youth, beauty, and fortune have placed at his disposal. He desires to *live;* you, my noblest pupil—if I may still call the honour mine of having guided your youthful steps along the brightest paths of the world of Pleasure—will teach him *how.*

'His education as a man of the world is but just begun; watched over and directed by your mature judgment, it will be rapidly completed. You, better than any other man I ever knew, can throw open to him the portals of the double world in which you reign—the blazoned world of

the *haute noblesse*, the rose-decked world of gallantry.

'Take my neophyte by the hand, and make of him, I pray of you, an accomplished gentleman, worthy of the best drawing-rooms and the most exclusive boudoirs.

'Finally, forgive me, my dear Lord Carleon, for inflicting on you this long epistle; allow me to thank you in advance for the complete success of my request; and suffer me to call myself ever and always your old friend,

'Le Chevalier Philippe de Villiers.'

Gerald, who had received this long letter unsealed, took the opportunity offered by his journey to read it, and smiled complacently at the pompous eulogiums which the old man had been pleased to pass on him. With such a letter of introduction he could not for a moment doubt the kind of reception which awaited him from Lord Carleon.

Arrived at the end of his railway journey he got into a cab, and directed the driver to take him to the Palace Hotel.

'To-morrow morning,' he said to himself, 'I will call upon Lord Carleon and deliver the old Chevalier's letter.'

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II.

The Primrose Path.

CHAPTER I.

A CHOICE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS OF FASHION.

Lord Carleon was not yet down when, early on the morning after his arrival in London, Gerald hastened to Bolton-street, and presented his letter of introduction. The Swiss valet, who answered him in almost faultless English, informed him that Lord Carleon was rarely visible before one o'clock; and Gerald begged him to tell his master that at that hour the bearer of the letter (which he left) would do himself the honour to wait upon his lordship.

At the hour named he returned, and was instantly shown to the drawing-room, where, at the end of a few moments, he was joined by Lord Carleon.

But before the appearance of the master

of the house, Gerald had time to remark the refined and exquisitely luxurious taste which had presided over the furniture of the room. The hangings of the windows were of brown velvet, and subdued the morning light, so that on Lord Carleon's entry into the room his visitor could not very plainly distinguish his lordship's features.

Lord Carleon extended his hand as he advanced towards Gerald, saying as he did so:

'I am most happy to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Sir Gerald Dalbright,—to add your name to the limited list of my dearest friends, I hope.'

'Such a title would be most precious to me, if you did me the honour to confer it on me,' replied Gerald; 'it is almost more than I dared to hope for, even from the only too flattering introduction of my excellent friend, the Chevalier de Villiers.'

'That reminds me that I have not yet

entirely read my old friend's lengthy letter. May I treat you with the freedom of a friend of long standing — that is to say, without formality—and finish my reading at once?'

Gerald begged of him the honour of being treated wholly without ceremony, and Lord Carleon crossed to the window, the hangings of which he drew aside, thus placing himself in a full light while he stood reading the Chevalier's letter.

Until that moment Gerald had not distinctly seen the features of his new friend, and took this opportunity to study a face in the lineaments of which he easily deciphered the signs of a vigorous moral and intellectual character—of a character certain to impress whoever was brought within the sphere of its influence.

As soon as he had finished reading the letter, Lord Carleon placed it in his pocket, and turned to Gerald, whose face for the first time he had been able to distinguish

clearly. The impression made upon him by the sight of the young man's features was almost overwhelming. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but his trembling lips refused to articulate a single word. A sort of bewilderment appeared to have seized upon his faculties.

He had become in an instant deadly pale, and would have fallen, had not Gerald sprung to his assistance and supported him to a sofa. His feebleness lasted but for a moment, and little by little the colour returned to his face. His looks became more calm, but remained fixed upon Gerald's countenance with a strange and intense persistency.

'It is nothing—really nothing,' he said, in reply to his visitor's anxious inquiry on the subject of this sudden attack.

'I sincerely hope that nothing in my appearance has displeased you,' replied Gerald; 'yet your lordship seemed to find in my face—'

'Nothing, I assure you, but a wonderful resemblance between you and a person who is no more; a resemblance that awakens in my mind a crowd of painful remembrances, regrets, and even remorse. Forgive me for not having been able to exercise a greater control over my feelings.'

He rose and paced the room for a few seconds, murmuring to himself,

'What have I not done to drive away this bitter thought? I had almost succeeded, and now comes this haunting recollection in a living form to stand before me face to face!'

Lord Carleon sunk down upon a chair. He had forgotten the presence of his visitor, and had hidden his face in his hands.

Gerald saw that his visit at such a moment was completely inopportune.

'You are still unwell, my lord,' he said; 'pray allow me to take my leave.'

At the sound of the young man's voice, Lord Carleon started and rose to his feet,

extending his hand, and saying in a tone of almost paternal affectionateness,

'Do not hasten your departure, I beg. I assure you I am quite well enough to continue our conversation.' He led Gerald to the window and placed him in the full light, as a painter might have posed a model; and after contemplating his features for some time, added, 'The Chevalier was right, Gerald; you are very handsome.' In a lower tone he murmured, 'As handsome as the son of Marguerite might be!'

'And so you have brought your youth and fortune to London, to try for how much of pleasure you can barter them?' inquired Lord Carleon after a few moments' silence, and with a sort of half-smile upon his lips.

'Yes,' replied Gerald; 'I have asked myself what is the most desirable end of life; and the voice of my nature has answered in one word of delightful promise—Pleasure!'

'And Monsieur de Villiers has told you that no one better than myself can guide your early steps upon what Falstaff calls the "primrose path"?' said Lord Carleon. 'Well, I can, as the Chevalier has told you, open to you the doors of the most exclusive and refined drawing-rooms and the most charming boudoirs; I can, on the other hand, introduce you into the heart—let me rather say into the midst—of that elegant and vicious world which receives no recognition, but which yet makes itself seen and felt in every circumstance and interest of fashionable life.'

Lord Carleon looked at the face of his protégé for a moment intently.

'By which of these two ways will you make your entrance into our London society?'

'By the latter,' replied Gerald unhesitatingly.

'I had no doubt that would be your

answer,' said Lord Carleon, a faint shadow passing over his brow.

'Do you blame me?' inquired Gerald.

'Not at all. Why should I? You but propose to do that which I have done, and am still doing. What right can I have to blame you?'

Gerald failed to observe the tone of bitterness with which these sentences were spoken.

'The one point settled,' continued Lord Carleon, 'let us proceed to the settlement of another even more necessary to be taken into account. The Chevalier tells me that you have five thousand a year.'

'Very little, I fear, to live on handsomely in London,' said Gerald.

'I have but two thousand,' replied Lord Carleon, 'and yet I am considered to live in luxury. If you follow my advice, you will have quite enough to enable you to shine in the front rank of society. You have a country house?'

'Yes; a fine old place, with preserves full of game. But I detest the country, and shall live wholly in town.'

'You'll find that a mistake. No, no. Every autumn, in the shooting-season, you will invite down to your place half-a-dozen friends, a few pretty women, and a good cook; and you'll discover that the country is by no means so detestable as you now think it.'

Gerald confessed that the prospect was highly promising, on the contrary.

Under the advice of Lord Carleon, all the details of his method of living were settled —the hiring of a small house in Mayfair, its furnishing, the adequate number of servants and horses requisite for his use and comfort.

All these matters arranged, the friends parted, to meet again at dinner at one of Lord Carleon's clubs. Dinner over, they went to the theatre, and afterwards to supper at the house of a lady bearing the grandiose title of the Principessa di Volani.

'This lady's title is nothing more than a *nom de guerre*, I take it for granted,' said Gerald, as he and Lord Carleon were being driven, about one o'clock in the morning, in the direction of Regent's-park.

'I'd strongly advise you to take nothing for granted, except the prettiness of the women you are going to meet in the Princess's drawing-room; that is expected of you as a matter of politeness, and you'll find it save you from otherwise inevitable disappointment.'

'But you repeat that she is a princess?'

'Enormously—but of the left hand; a fact which, as it more immediately affects her than any one else, she, of course, regrets more than anybody.'

'And—the Prince?'

'A most indisputable entity, who has long been famous in the world of diplomacy.'

'Why, then, he must be—anything but a young man?'

'As you say, anything but a young man; considerably older now than he was even twenty years ago, when he first became the recognised protector of the Principessa.'

'Twenty years ago!' cried Gerald in astonishment; 'then the Princess herself must be—'

'You'll say so when you see her—a charming woman; thirty at most when she is full dressed, and you are never likely to see her otherwise. The men who go to her parties never think of asking her age, nor try to remember the number of pretty women they have had the pleasure of meeting at her house—and none but very pretty women are ever to be met there.'

'She is rich, I suppose?'

'That I really cannot tell you anything about. But it is tolerably well known that she somehow contrives to spend a great deal of money.'

'Shall we see the Prince at her house this evening?'

'Certainly not. He is away with his embassy at one of the great courts.'

'And he does not object to the Princess amusing herself in this way during his absence?'

'Apparently not, since she has always done so.'

'He's not jealous, then?'

'Not if he is so wise as some people declare him to be. By the way, the charming Princess has about her a young person whom she calls her niece, but whom I strongly suspect of being bound to her by much closer ties. The Princess is always on the look-out for her pretty niece; be on your guard accordingly.'

By the time the conversation had reached this point, they had arrived at the house of the Principessa di Volani, on the north-western side of Regent's-park, and

found a number of broughams drawn-up on either side of the road.

The door was opened by one of three powdered footmen, whom they found in the hall, dressed in sumptuous livery. One of them stepped forward with respectful alacrity, and inquired:

'Shall I announce your lordship?'

'Not necessary, Thomas,' replied Lord Carleon carelessly; 'we will announce ourselves. Are there many people here to-night?'

'About the usual number, my lord; her highness's ordinary visitors.'

'They have not yet sat down to supper?'

'No, my lord; they're still dancing.'

'Very good. We'll go in through the boudoir, so as not to derange the dancers.'

They passed upstairs, and Thomas opened a door and admitted them into a splendidly-furnished drawing-room, used only on extraordinary occasions. A small door, hidden by draperies, opened out of

this room into a charming boudoir, hung with amber-coloured silk covered with white lace-work. Nobody was in this room; but through an open door, on the side opposite to that by which they had entered, they heard the melody of a waltz played upon a piano.

Lord Carleon and Gerald passed quietly into a second drawing-room whence the sounds proceeded, and found themselves forming part of a company consisting of some fifteen to twenty men and about a dozen elegantly-dressed women, and in an atmosphere of careless gaiety.

A young man was seated at the piano, two or three couples were waltzing, the rest were laughing and chatting.

The moment Lord Carleon and Gerald set foot within the door of the drawing-room, their entrance was observed by a tall and handsome woman, who crossed the room to meet them. It was the mistress of the house, the Principessa di Volani.

Her face was pale, of a uniform opaque whiteness, but never expressed fatigue except in the morning; at night, the play of well-disposed light, aided by an imperceptible quantity of rouge skilfully laid on, gave to it a wonderfully brilliant appearance.

Brown and shining, her hair was magnificent in its abundance—only it suggested a query as to whether it was absolutely all her own. Some of her women friends affected to doubt—rivals probably. Two persons, the Princess's hairdresser and the Princess's lady's-maid, could have set such doubts at rest in a moment; but they were never consulted, and both preserved the discreetest silence.

The Princess had large black eyes and rose-red lips; perhaps the lips may have owed something to cosmetic aid, but the eyes had at once the brightness of the diamond and the softness of velvet, and could hardly be suspected of artificial embellishment.

She was tall and plump. Her white shoulders and her round arms were those of a piece of Greek sculpture—beyond criticism. But her feet were too large, her white hands were under-bred. The ultra-plebeian origin of the Principessa di Volani was, in fact, only too plainly betrayed by the character of these extremities.

Moreover, there were people living who, had they seen the Principessa di Volani out of her diamonds, might immediately have recognised in her the daughter of a tippling laundress attached to one of the inns of law, and addressed her familiarly as 'Carry Baker.'

This evening she was dressed to appear at her very best. Her low-cut bodice exhibited completely her handsome shoulders and half her bosom. On the side of her head, in the midst of the heavy mass of her dark hair, she had placed a rose of deep colour, giving to her face an expression both original and provocative of admira-

tion. Another rose, of the same hue, was placed at the top of her corsage as a foil to the pale whiteness of the flesh upon which it rested.

'The Principessa,' whispered Lord Carleon to Gerald, as the lady came across the room. 'Good-evening, my dear Olympia,' he added aloud, shaking the hand of the Princess.

'Good-evening, my dear Carleon,' she replied, her gaze all the time inquiringly fixed upon Gerald. 'You are late this evening.'

'Allow me to present to you a friend of mine,' said Lord Carleon, by way of answer. 'Sir Gerald Dalbright—good-looking as a son of the Indian Bacchus, as your own eyes will tell you at a glance; rich as the heir of the finance agent-in-chief of his late majesty Crœsus of Lydia and of auriferous memory. You'll not think the worse of him for being rich, I'm sure.'

Gerald bowed.

'Upon my word, Sir Gerald, you must have been born under *two* lucky stars!' cried the Princess, laughing.

Gerald would have replied, but three or four young women, who were standing in a knot at the farther end of the room, and who had never taken their eyes off him from the moment he entered, called the Princess to them. Before going, however, she whispered in Lord Carleon's ear,

'He's delightful! Is he *really* so rich as you pretend?'

'Five thousand a year,' replied Lord Carleon in the same low tone.

'On your word of honour?'

'Absolutely.'

She hastened across the room, and was immediately subjected to a close questioning by the young women who had called her.

'What did she say to you?' asked Gerald.

'She asked me, on my word of honour,

whether you are really rich. I told her you *are*, and she is now repeating the glad tidings to the charming bevy of beauties by whom she is surrounded. Look out; you'll be attacked instanter.'

'Trust me,' cried Gerald, with a smile; 'I shall make a truly heroic defence!'

CHAPTER II.

SUPPER AT THE PRINCIPESSA'S.

To the waltz succeeded a country dance, in which, excepting Lord Carleon, Gerald, an ex-cabinet minister, and a gentleman high at the Bar, who was at the moment the victim of rheumatism in his left leg, all the company joined.

'My dear Lord Carleon, pray oblige me by commencing my education; strip off the masks from the people I see here, and tell me who they are.'

'The men or the women?'

'The women first. They interest me infinitely more.'

'Well, question me.'

Gerald fixed his eyes on an apparently-

young girl, with large dreamy dark eyes and magnificent hair.

'Who is that charming-looking girl in the rose-coloured silk dress?'

Instead of answering the question, Lord Carleon started, and burst into an irrepressible fit of laughter.

'My dear fellow,' he said at length, 'what delight your first visit to the Opera will give you!'

'Why?' asked Gerald hesitatingly.

'Because you will believe in everything you see; you will take painted trees for real timber and leaves, canvas cottages for veritable pieces of rural architecture; and, above all, you will believe that the figurantes in the ballet are the Arcadian innocents they appear to be, and nothing else under the sun.'

Gerald blushed crimson.

'That charming-looking girl in the rose-coloured silk dress is not a girl at all. Her complexion—so fresh and pure—is bought by the ounce; her beautifully-arched eye-

brows are painted by herself with practised skill; her hair is, charitably speaking, three-parts of it false.'

'Is it possible,' cried Gerald, 'I could have been so easily deceived?'

'More easily,' said Lord Carleon, smiling somewhat sadly. 'However,' he added, 'there is something still more deceptive about Vivienne than the composition of her complexion. She comes of noble lineage.'

'In the same manner as the Princess?'

'Not at all; and she herself knows how to make the most out of her exceptional—in this case I may truly say—advantages. Before she was three-and-twenty she was divorced and discarded by her relatives. She had not a penny in the world of her own; she has not spent less than five thousand a year from that time till now; and I daresay she is not much more deeply in debt than many of her betters.'

'And that woman with the Oriental eyes?'

'Camilla—an actress some call her—not the critics.'

'Does she still belong to the stage?'

'No; she only used the stage as an effective mode of advertising her beauty. A few years back she made so great a hit as Lady Godiva, that her adorers carried her off from the theatre, and never again permitted her to repeat her captivating performance in public.'

'My dear Lord Carleon, your portraits are not extremely flattering,' said Gerald, smiling.

'They are something less common,' replied Lord Carleon; 'they are extremely truthful; and it is clearly not my fault if the truth in their case happens to be a little unflattering.'

'What would the ladies themselves say if they heard you?'

'They would accuse my gallantry, but not my frankness. They all of them know that I say of them just what I think; and,

in spite of that, I assure you they are one and all very fond of me.'

'It's because they know themselves to be better than you describe them to be.'

'No; it's because they are too cynical to care in the smallest degree for anybody's opinion of them.'

For a moment or two they lapsed into silence; but presently Gerald touched Lord Carleon's elbow, and whispered in his ear,

'Look yonder — by the piano — at the young woman turning over the music.'

'She pleases you?' inquired Lord Carleon, smiling at the other's earnest manner.

'Very greatly, I own,' replied Gerald. 'Are you going to tell me something bad of her also?'

'Perhaps.'

'But do you know that by doing this you will be horribly disenchanting me?'

'What then?'

'Well, laugh at me as much as you like; but it seems to me that there is about this

woman an atmosphere more luminous, more pure—that there is something chaste in her fair head, in her blue and almost timid eyes. Assuredly with those three bunches of violets—one in her hair, one in her bosom, and the other carried in her little hand—she has the air of a young duchess; and if, on leaving this house, I never see her again, her face will remain engraven on my memory as that of a fairy or an angel.'

'Your juvenile enthusiasm is beyond question amusing, my dear Gerald, as you yourself will before long discover; but it is quite pardonable in this instance. The woman who has so strongly interested you is superior—very superior—to most of her companions. She has been for the last ten years one of our chief actresses in comedy. She is known as Miss Florestan, and she is an immense favourite with the public; and for the public she has always shown the most perfect respect. Her extravagance is boundless. No doubt, if she could have

her way, she would, like Cleopatra, breakfast off a dissolved pearl; but she has never lost her own self-respect—never permitted herself to be drawn into the vortex of vulgar vice. You yourself have remarked that she has the air of a duchess. She has loved often, and loved deeply—*really* loved: it is for this that, I own, I feel indulgent towards her, and admit her to be a true diamond amid the paste-jewels around her.'

At this moment a servant appeared at the door, and announced that supper was ready.

This announcement had the effect of bringing a joyous smile upon every face. In a moment each of the ladies found herself under charge of a cavalier, and the laughing chatting couples filed merrily downstairs to the supper-room.

The Princess took Gerald's arm, Lord Carleon took Camilla under his protection, and, in spite of the evil things he had been saying of her only a few minutes before,

poured into her ready ears a stream of pretty sayings and flowery compliments, which she accepted without a doubt as to the genuineness of their mintage.

The supper-room of the Principessa di Volani was delightful to see.

During the summer, a light mat of Indian straw covered the floor in place of a carpet. The fresh night-air was wafted into the room through open windows well protected with rich muslin curtains. In one of the corners a fountain sent forth a continuous jet of water, contributing not a little to maintain the atmosphere in a cool and refreshing state. The table was set with plate of exquisite workmanship, and with Sèvres china of great value.

Champagne, delicately tempered by contact with ice, flowed in unlimited abundance; and the most perfect freedom and good understanding reigned at these suppers.

The Principessa seated Lord Carleon on

her left hand and Gerald on her right, and beside the latter she placed a young lady of about twenty. At first he imagined this young person to be the niece of whom Lord Carleon had spoken to him; but he was mistaken.

Isoline — such was the name of the 'niece'—never appeared either at the balls or the suppers given at her aunt's house. The Princess had her reasons for so arranging matters.

The supper had not long commenced, when the lady of the house leaned towards Lord Carleon, and asked him in a low voice:

'Is your friend amusing himself, Carleon?'

'My dear Olympia, in your house how could he do otherwise?'

'I did not ask you for a compliment, but for an answer.'

'Well then, frankly, he is enchanted.'

'Truly? How old is he?'

'Just two-and-twenty.'

'Has he—ever been in love?'

'Never till to-night.'

'To-night! Has he seen any one here who has taken his fancy?'

'Can you doubt it?'

'But who is it?'

'I really don't think I ought to tell you.'

'Nonsense! Why not?'

'Because, my dear Olympia, that some one is—you,' replied Lord Carleon with a coolness that made the resplendent Princess completely his dupe.

'Me!' she cried, simpering. 'What nonsense are you talking?'

'Nothing is more serious, my dear Olympia.'

'You know well that—that I am not free.'

'I told him so,' said Lord Carleon; 'but that only added fuel to flame.'

'I won't believe a word of it!' cried the

Princess. 'If your friend meant anything of the sort, has he not got a tongue in his head?'

'But you forget how young and timid he is. Encourage him, and then you'll see.'

'You've lost your head, I believe!' cried the Princess.

'On the contrary, you know well how solidly placed it is, since even you have never been able to turn it.'

The Princess laughed heartily.

'Come now,' she said, 'let's talk reasonably. You see whom I have placed by his side?'

'Little Blondine.'

'You know her?'

'Enough to tell you what I think of her.'

'And what *do* you think of her?'

'She's not the worst of her sex.'

'Not by a long way. And, poor thing, she's been very unfortunate: had an attachment of the heart—*real* attachment, I

mean—and so—don't laugh!—got into debt and all sorts of horrid trouble. Now, if your friend—'

'My dear Olympia, I am not, I assure you, the tutor of my friend Sir Gerald, who is free both heart and purse.'

'I understand all that; but I know what influence you exercise over all who come in contact with you.'

'You desire me not to forbid my friend coming to the aid of your protégée, if he is inclined to do so. Is that it?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I promise you, if he asks my advice, I will say nothing adverse to your wishes. Now are you content?'

'You are a dear good fellow, and you may kiss me!'

As she spoke she held her cheek towards him, and he kissed the corner of her lips.

The young lady who formed the subject of this singular conversation was, as we

have said, about twenty years of age. Her name—or rather her *nom de guerre*—of Blondine had come to her from the colour of her hair. She was pretty and fresh-complexioned—her beauty and freshness both real and of good quality; hence possibly no one had ever thought of ruining himself for her.

She had very little mind, some little heart, not the least knowledge of orthography—and, as to morals, not wholly corrupted.

Blondine, at that particular time, was a member of the ballet at one of the large theatres, and her earnings were about twenty-three shillings a week for some eight months out of the twelve.

Gerald had pleased her at first sight. Five minutes after the supper commenced she had fallen desperately in love with him; and long before the supper was over, she had told him so. In appearance at least he had accepted this avowal as a homage na-

turally due to him; but in reality vanity had mounted to his head, and he felt himself puffed up with pride and joy.

The pretended *roué* had been befooled in the twinkling of an eye.

Rapidly the hours fled. The supper went on, and without actually turning into an orgie, gradually lost the calm and discreet complexion it had worn at the commencement.

Generous wines circulated in profusion. The ordinary restraints of conversation were every moment more and more disregarded; jest followed jest, each one outreaching the other on the side of freedom of application, and each was received with salvoes of applause.

Lord Carleon replenished the Princess's glass with champagne, and Blondine filled her own and Gerald's glass, and all three drank against each other, while Lord Carleon laughed in his sleeve to see them do it.

The Princess repeated to herself that Gerald was a delightful fellow, and that he had fallen in love with her; on the strength of which impression she squeezed his left arm, and softly pressed upon his foot; while Blondine was on the point of throwing her arms about his neck every three minutes.

All this attention he found delightful. He crackled like a match between two fires, and gave himself up to the double intoxication of pleasure and champagne. But little by little he lost the control of his lips, and his eyes half-closed themselves.

He struggled against the helplessness that was stealing over him; but in vain. He made an ineffectual effort to pass one arm round the Princess, while the other encompassed the more slender waist of Blondine. His head lurched forward, and he fell asleep upon the table.

'O,' cried the two ladies at the same moment and in a tone of vexation, 'he's fallen asleep!'

'Be indulgent, ladies!' cried Lord Carleon; 'remember it's his *first* supper!'

'Besides, he's so young,' added the Princess, relenting and taking a sentimental tone of voice.

'But he has now served his apprenticeship!' cried Blondine.

And before any one knew what she was going to do, she sprang on a chair, and seizing a glass half-full of champagne, poured it over the bent head of the sleeper, crying as she did so in a voice of comic solemnity,

'Thus I make him free of ours—the gayest of all communities!'

CHAPTER III.

WARNED OF THE PERIL.

GERALD was thoroughly intoxicated; consequently he knew nothing of the means by which he was conveyed to his hotel and put to bed. Lord Carleon was as sober at the end of the Princess's supper as at the beginning, and took charge of his incapable young friend, reaching his own house somewhere about five o'clock in the morning.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, he sent his valet to inquire after Gerald's welfare, who brought back word that that gentleman was quite well; also that he had gone out in company with a lady who had called upon him, and had insisted on his being awoke, that her name might be taken to him. The servants at the hotel had not

remembered the name she sent up to Sir Gerald.

A very few moments' reflection served to suggest to Lord Carleon's mind the true explanation of the apparent mystery of Gerald's conduct.

'Blondine!' he said to himself. 'The dear child may compliment herself on not having lost any time. She must be very much in love—or terribly in want of money!'

On the morning of the day following the visit of the fair Blondine, Gerald found a note from Lord Carleon awaiting his return. It ran as follows:

'My dear Gerald,—If no more *agreeable* engagement binds you, and if you are not afraid of being bored by a couple of hours' chat, will you come and breakfast with me? As you are too young to be a *gourmet*, I will say nothing of the good things you will find at my bachelor table. I will only add, that I want to preach to

you a little on the score of morals—and that my cigars are the best *I* know of. I shall wait breakfast for you till twelve o'clock.—Ever yours, CARLEON.'

Gerald had just time to dress and reach Bolton-street as the clock struck twelve.

'If I had thought of Blondine's address, you might have received my note last night,' said Lord Carleon, with a little touch of malice.

Gerald became scarlet.

'Don't blush, my dear fellow. Blondine is a very charming little woman.'

'That she is, indeed,' cried Gerald; 'and she appears to love me enormously.'

'Nothing is more likely,' replied Lord Carleon. 'Blondine, my dear Gerald, is quite a heroine of constancy—she has already, I assure you, given several astonishing examples of fidelity.'

Gerald evidently winced under the irony of these remarks; Lord Carleon therefore,

having no wish to wound his feelings, changed the subject of conversation, and led his guest into the dining-room, where breakfast was heartily partaken of by both.

When the meal was finished, Lord Carleon and Gerald removed into an elegantly-furnished smoking-room, whither they were immediately followed by a servant in livery bearing a silver tray, on which were two cups of Japanese china, a coffee-pot, and a sugar-basin, which he set on a small table. By the side of the tray he placed a liqueur-case, a box of cigars, a lighted taper, and some folded strips of paper. Then, after arranging two lounging chairs, one on either side of the table, he discreetly retired.

The two friends seated themselves.

Gerald was in that light and self-satisfied state of mind which ordinarily follows upon the enjoyment of an excellent breakfast. Lord Carleon, on the contrary, was evidently under the influence of some engrossing idea. For several minutes he spoke

little, and appeared thoughtful. He filled Gerald's cup and his own, and both lit cigars.

'My dear Gerald,' he said at last, as if forcing himself to speak on the subject that was absorbing his attention, 'do you remember that, in the note I sent you inviting you to breakfast, I threatened you with a little sermonising on the subject of morals?'

'You don't mean to say you are really going to carry your threat into execution?' demanded Gerald gaily.

'Can you suggest any reason why I shouldn't?'

'None whatever; so, if the impulse is irresistible, moralise to your heart's content, my dear Carleon. I know that your code of morals is not a very severe one.'

'Don't be too sure. In the first place, my dear fellow, it was agreed that you should make your entrance into society under my charge, and I undertook—according to the formula of the Chevalier—

to teach you "how to live." Since the night before last I have thought a good deal upon the subject of all this.'

'With what view?'

'It appears to me that you may make a nobler use of your intelligence, your strength, and your fortune, than to squander all these treasures among *roués* and women without hearts. I would rather help you to become a man than a mere creature of fashionable life.'

Gerald listened to this utterly unexpected address with profound and momently-increasing astonishment. His face expressed complete bewilderment.

'Do you understand me?' asked Lord Carleon.

'Scarcely,' replied Gerald.

'I will explain myself better,' said Lord Carleon. 'Tell me what you think of the society into which I experimentally introduced you the night before last.'

'I think it highly amusing.'

'You see nothing to object to in it?'

'Why should I?'

Lord Carleon made no answer to this question.

'Will you allow me to ask you a question?' Gerald said, seeing that Lord Carleon did not immediately continue the conversation.

'A dozen, if you wish it,' replied Lord Carleon thoughtfully.

'Are not the habits and manners of the men I met at the Princess's house those of the men of the society in which you yourself occupy a foremost place?'

'Unfortunately, yes.'

'Then, it seems to me—if you allow me to speak my mind frankly—there is an absolute discrepancy between your acts and your teaching, as though you had adopted the axiom of that forgotten preacher who besought his flock not to do as he did, but as he told them to do. In other terms, my dear Lord Carleon, I find you to be two

men—one of action, one of argument. Pray enlighten me as to which of the two is right, which of the two I am to imitate or be counselled by.'

Lord Carleon listened, a half-jesting expression, which had become habitual, upon his face.

'You wish to come to that point?' he asked; 'and you have nothing to add?'

'No.'

'I'll answer you conclusively, then. The judgment you have formed of me is specious, I admit; but it is very far from just, as I will presently prove to you. You tell me that there is a disagreement between my words and my acts; and you ask me which you are to be guided by, my example or my advice. There is no room for a moment's doubt. You perfectly well know that I am right in speaking as I do, and that I am wrong in doing as I do.

'My dear Gerald, I now ask you, with all the earnestness of my heart, to listen to my

advice, and to shun the dangerous example of my conduct, if you are tempted to take example by it. You are young; life is all before you, and you may make it a happy one, if you will. You are rich, and may make a noble and generous use of your fortune. You may unite your fate to that of some chaste and charming girl, to whom you may offer your first and only love. You will see your life renewed in your children, who will be your joy and glory—living as you have lived, happy and honoured.'

'Such language in the mouth of Lord Carleon!' cried Gerald, in a low tone of astonishment.

'I can well understand your surprise,' said Lord Carleon; 'but do you know why I speak to you in this way, Gerald? I will tell you. It is because I feel a deep regard for you — an affectionate regard, Gerald. I scarcely know you; I see you to-day for the third time only; yet I feel that you occupy a place in my heart; and I cannot

consider you either in the light of a stranger or as one who is indifferent to me. I cannot stand by smiling, and see your careless bark plunged into an abyss of which I know the almost unfathomable depths.

'Believe me, Gerald, I have long discovered the nothingness, the cruel bitterness of the existence whose false glitter now allures you; and I fulfil a duty when I cry to you, "Be warned of the peril!" In the region of this peril the judgment is perverted, the heart is vitiated, the soul corrupted, the intelligence destroyed, honour stained; and it is from all this that I would preserve you, as I would do my own son—if I had one, and he resembled you.'

These words were pronounced by Lord Carleon with an emotion which he did not attempt to conceal. He fixed on Gerald a tender penetrating look, to see whether the emotion by which he was himself so deeply moved affected his young companion.

Gerald remained wholly unmoved. In-

deed he had scarcely heard the latter portion of Lord Carleon's address; his thoughts having wandered to Blondine and the gay circle of guests at the house of the Principessa di Volani.

Lord Carleon saw plainly that he had to deal with an exceptional nature; that he had addressed a heart already vitiated and hardened. He resolved, however, to make a last effort.

'No doubt,' he said, 'you wonder how it comes to pass that I, at my age, and preaching as I do to others, still pursue the beaten paths of existence, away from which I am trying to turn you. Well, into this life, which appears so brilliant to you, I long ago threw myself—not from taste, but to escape from remorse which beset me. I accepted this kind of life as an expiation—I continue it as a chastisement.'

'Good heavens, what do you mean?' cried Gerald, in whom these words suddenly awakened a lively curiosity.

'You really wish to know?' asked Lord Carleon.

'Yes; if my desire is not an indiscretion.'

'It is the story of my youth; may the experience of my faults profit you better than it has me! This story I have never told to any one. In telling it to you I am going to reopen in my heart wounds that can never be healed, and that will bleed anew, as in the days when they were freshly received. But what matters it, if I attain the end I have in view?—and I shall attain it, Gerald, if you listen to me with affectionate attention, and with a mind open to conviction.'

He told him the whole story of his early years; laid bare to him every detail of his guilty love, and guiltier abandonment of Marguerite. Reaching the point of his story where he had lost all trace of Madame Simon and her daughter, he continued:

'For years my life had no other end than to recover Marguerite; but hope at length died in despair. Then it was that I returned to London, and plunged into the wild existence of the brilliant world in which I have ever since lived; in which I have hidden from all eyes the incurable sorrow gnawing at my heart.

'I have put a mask upon my visage to disguise its deadly pallor; I have compelled my lips to smile, and nobody has discovered that the smile was but a bitter grimace. My heart no longer beats; my senses have no longer any desires.

'Often I have thought of squandering my fortune in one year of royal opulence, then finishing by suicide the existence that was weighing me down. But from the execution of this design I have always shrunk.

'Do you know why, Gerald? Because I have said to myself, that I had no right to dispose of my fortune and life. Nei-

ther the one nor the other belongs to me: they belong to Marguerite and to my child, if heaven one day gives them back to me.

'Now, Gerald, you know what I have been—you know what I am. Do you now understand why I seek—and why I shall always seek — to lead you from the fatal path which you desire to follow?'

Lord Carleon ceased speaking; and at first Gerald seemed disinclined to make any remark. He had listened with curiosity and interest, but entirely without emotion, to the painful narrative of his host.

'You are silent,' said Lord Carleon.

'What can I say?' replied Gerald.

'Come, Gerald, do not close your heart and reason to the bitter teaching of my experience. Look at the noble and serious side of life; promise me to be a man, and not a mere seeker of hollow and worthless pleasures.'

Gerald shook his head.

'You persist in the course you have determined on?'

'I do.'

'In spite of everything I can say to you —in spite of all I have said?'

'Nothing that you have said proves that youth is not the season of pleasure. You judge yourself severely. You committed, long ago, certain faults which I should have viewed with very indulgent eyes, but for which, you say, you are pursued by remorse. I have nothing of the sort to reproach myself with—no unpleasant recollections to trouble the enjoyments I promise myself.'

'In heaven's name, Gerald, reflect.'

'Thank you, I'd rather not; I might fall into the weakness of changing my mind.'

'But this is mere folly.'

'At least it's a delightful sort of folly.'

'Think of the future.'

'Time enough for that when the future comes.'

'Gerald, once more I ask you to be worthy of yourself. You are a gentleman; remember the proud and glorious motto of our caste—*Noblesse oblige.*'

Gerald interrupted him.

'My dear Lord Carleon, I beg of you not to continue in this strain. You have favoured me with excellent advice, and if I could have bowed to your reason or yielded to your wishes, I would have done so; but my side is taken, after due consideration, and my resolution is irrevocable.'

This was said in a tone so peremptory, that Lord Carleon was convinced it would be useless to make any farther attempt.

'Take your own course, since it must be so,' he said, bowing sadly; 'your destiny be accomplished,' he added with a deep sigh.

'Do you entirely abandon me, then?' asked Gerald.

'No,' answered Lord Carleon gravely; 'I should be afraid to do that. You have

determined to launch your frail bark upon a stormy sea; I will at least hold the helm, and save you, if I can, from foundering amid the rocks that thickly beset your course.'

END OF VOL. I.

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